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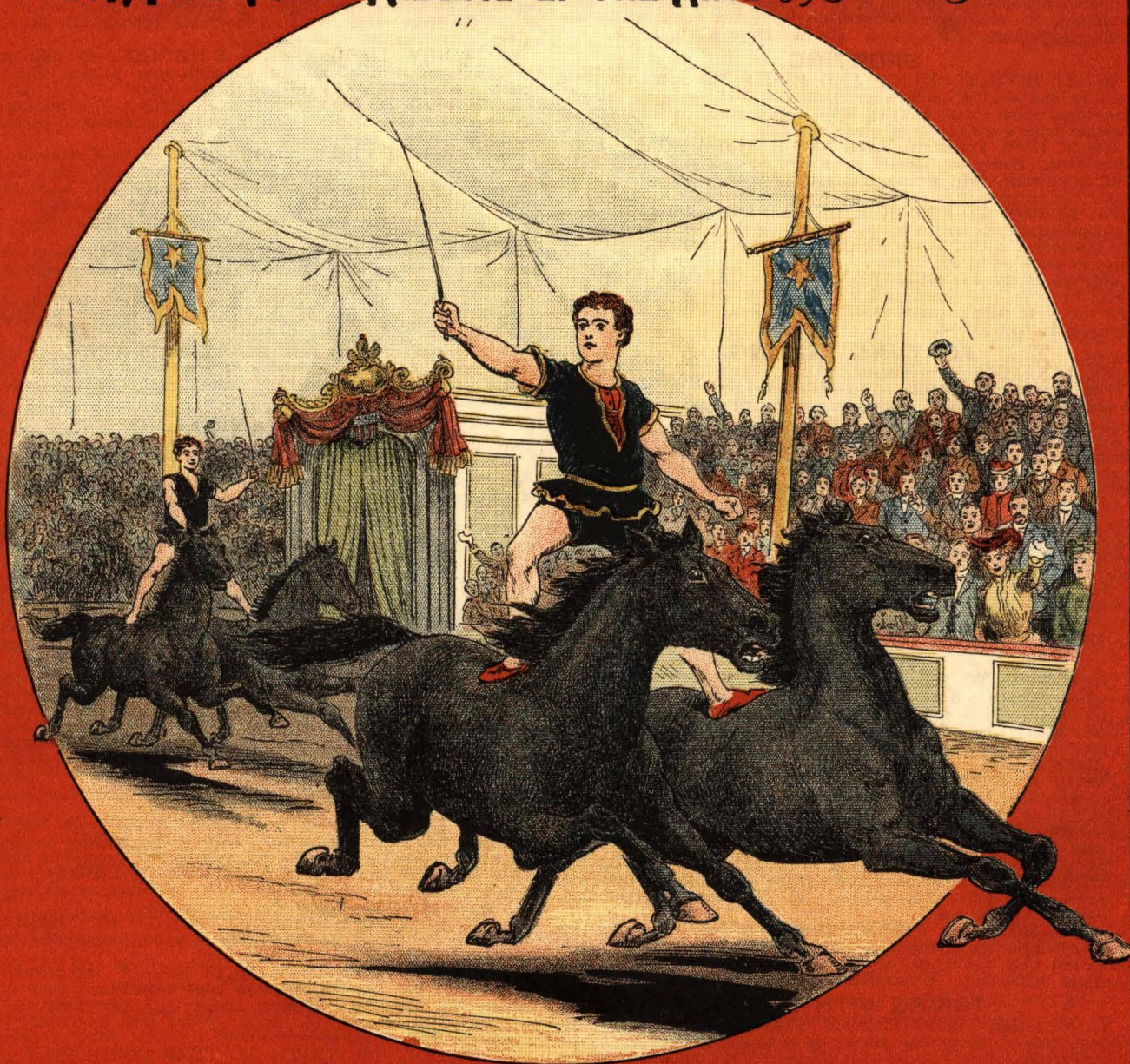
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NEW YORK, MAY 18, 1904.

Price 5 Cents.

ACROSS THE CONTINENT WITH A CIRCUS; OR, THE TWIN RIDERS OF THE RING. *By BERTON BERTREW.*



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NEW YORK, MAY 18, 1904.

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Across The Continent With a Circus;

OR,

The Twin Riders of the Ring.

By Berton Bertrew.

CHAPTER I.

A ROMAN HELMET.

"Hoop-la! Hoop-la! Thinks he's a mighty slick rider! That's only the third hoop! Bet ten dollars he misses the next! Hoop-la! What did I tell you? Could ride better than that myself!"

Thus shrieked Happy Joe, the clown attached to Montmorency's Grand Consolidated Circus and Menagerie, as he went prancing about after the coal black horses, upon which rode two young men in flesh tights and spangles, vieing each other in the number of paper covered hoops through which they could jump as the circuit of the ring was made.

Crack! Crack!

The sound of the ringmaster's whip echoed back from the canvas walls of the tent, seeming to curl about the legs of "Happy Joe, the great Australian Clown," as the flaring show-bills had him styled, sending him with grinning face, bobbing head and fingers in contemptuous contact with his nose reeling against the rope.

"I'll show him how I can ride! I'll show him, ladies and gents!" he shrieked, springing upon the back of a mule with his head toward the tail of the brute. "G'lang, January! Hoop-la! G'lang! What d'yer soy ter that!"

It was "Hoop-la!" in very fact!

Whether part of the show or the result of accident, the mule raised her hind-quarters abruptly, sending Happy Joe flying over her head, just as Burt Leroy, one of the twin riders, whose wonderful bareback exploits had rendered Montmorency's circus so famous throughout the United States, was making his last hoop.

Burt took the hoop splendidly, but the clown's mule business caused the horse to shy, and as a consequence the youthful acrobat found himself plumped upon the sawdust with terrific force.

Women screamed, men shouted, boys tried to leap the rope, and would have forced their way into the ring had not the sharp cracking of the master's whip driven them back.

Instantly Rob Leroy checked the speed of his horse,

bounded to the earth and sprang toward his brother, not reaching him, however, before the lithe figure of the fallen rider had reassumed the upright—unharmcd.

Hand in hand the twin brothers stood bowing gracefully, while the tent rang with deafening cheers.

It was the last act of Mr. Montague Montmorency's Grand Consolidated Circus and Menagerie, and the audience, which had gathered beneath the great tent spread upon the vacant lot at the corner of Eleventh avenue and Seventy-sixth street, in the city of New York, began pouring out.

Lights were being extinguished, horses led to quarters—even Happy Joe, the clown, known in every-day life as Pat Riley—had taken his departure from the ring.

"Confound you for a clumsy idiot! What the mischief did you mean by making a miss of it that time?" roared Winchell Hill, the ringmaster, approaching Burt Leroy with darkened countenance the moment the "greenroom" behind the canvas was reached.

"I'll larn ye! You ain't fit to ride muleback! Take that, an' see if it'll teach you to look where you drop next time!"

And the irate ringmaster, who was a tremendous tyrant, aimed a brutal blow at young Burt Leroy, which would to a certainty have knocked him senseless had not Rob, his brother, with well-directed aim, taken the bully squarely in the nose, sending him sprawling on his back.

"Don't you dare to strike my brother! It wasn't his fault."

The ringmaster, rubbing his damaged proboscis, was on his feet in an instant, and, as a matter of course, in a towering rage.

"I—I'll kill you, Rob Leroy!"

"Pooh! I ain't afraid. You'll never have a better chance. Suppose you undertake the job now?"

But Winchell Hill, like all petty tyrants, an arrant coward, showed no disposition to undertake the job.

Instead, he broke out with a perfect torrent of foul abuse, which was only checked by the sudden appearance among them of Mr. Montmorency himself.

"Here, here, what's all this row about?" he exclaimed. "I won't have any such goings on as this in my circus. Mr. Hill,

you need to exercise more control over yourself." Young gentlemen, you may come with me."

"There goes Jimmy Spratt and his pets," sneered the clown, as the circus manager and the twin riders disappeared behind a piece of flapping canvas which divided the private apartments of the former from the greenroom. "I wouldn't stand it if I were you, Mr. Hill, being stuck one side for them two upstarts. Upon my soul, it's a shame!"

The ringmaster rubbed his injured nose, and for an instant stared at the clown in silence.

"Pat," he whispered presently, "I don't propose to stand it. Mark my words, them two boys will have cause to remember this—you'll see."

Meanwhile quite a different scene was being enacted in the private apartment of Mr. Montague Montmorency, whose real name, as the reader may have drawn from the impertinent speech of the clown, was plain James Spratt.

In the narrow space beneath the tent into which he had ushered the boys, seated in the only comfortable chair, was a flashily-dressed man, unmistakably a Hebrew, smoking a rank cigar, and gazing about at the confused mass of spangled costumes, helmets, wooden battle-axes, paper shields, and other circus paraphernalia, looking for all the world as though he thought he owned the earth.

"That's Moses Eisenstein, the party I was telling you about last night," whispered Mr. Spratt, drawing the boys to one side. "For the last three years he has held a ten-thousand-dollar mortgage on my circus. Boys, I have been practically his slave and you have no idea what a galling thing it is. Thank goodness I have got the money to wipe out the debt at last and I want you to act as witnesses for me."

Of course Burt and Rob Leroy signified their willingness.

In fact, Mr. Spratt had called them into his room, explained the situation and requested this small favor of them the night before.

There was a tremendous racket going on all about them as keeping close behind the manager Burt and Rob now approached the expectant Jew.

Wheels could be heard rumbling, and men shouting as the heavy vans containing the wild beasts connected with the circus were being pushed about outside, for the stay of the "Grand Consolidated" in the city had come to an end, and already preparations for a move had begun.

"Vell, mein freund, haf you got de monish to square my leedle account?"

"I am happy to say I have, Mr. Eisenstein. You have brought the papers necessary to cancel the mortgage, I suppose?"

"Certain. I haf de satisfaction piece here," replied the Jew, pulling some legal-appearing documents from his pocket. "First de monish, den de papers, huh? Very goot, mein freund, very goot."

"Oh, I've got the money ready, don't you fear," replied the manager, cheerfully. "I put it in this old Roman helmet in my trunk here—funny strongbox, ain't it? These two young gentlemen will act as witnesses to the transaction, and then we're square."

Mr. Spratt had knelt beside a large black trunk while speaking, and, raising the lid, now drew out a paper imitation of an ancient Roman helmet with the visor down.

Evidently this was the money-box referred to.

It formed by no means a bad receptacle for cash, though one somewhat insecure.

The Jew, with his cigar between his teeth, was in the act of spreading the papers out upon a table, when Winchell Hill came bustling in.

"Look here, Mr. Spratt, we've got to get a new bottom put onto the tiger's cage before we start. I've just discovered that it's badly loosened and may drop off any time."

"I can't attend to you now, Hill, I'm busy."

"But this is a thing which can't be put off. I've had the cage wheeled around just outside the door here, and I want you to come and look at it."

"Some other time, some other time," replied the manager, sharply. "Don't you see I'm in the midst of some business with this gentleman. I wish you would have the goodness to step outside and not bother me now."

"You've always got time to attend to everyone but me," growled the ringmaster, who was also general superintendent of the circus under the manager himself. "I tell you, Mr. Spratt, the cage is in a highly dangerous condition and—heavens and earth! What did I tell you! You wouldn't listen and this is the result."

The speech of the ringmaster had been interrupted.

Even as these last angry words were uttered a fierce roar had broken through the circus tent.

"The tiger's loose—the tiger's loose!" shrieked a dozen voices from behind the flapping canvas.

With a wild cry of terror the Hebrew money-lender sprang upon the table, having first seized upon one of the "property" spears for a defensive weapon, which he brandished furiously as the manager and the ringmaster, with countenances as pale as death, hurried toward the door.

They did not reach it.

Three steps in advance had not been taken when there burst upon the ears of all present a second roar, which seemed to shake the very ground beneath them, and a giant Bengal tiger, with open jaws, showing its horrid fangs, dashed into their midst.

Passing Mr. Spratt as though never seeing him, the huge brute precipitated itself upon the trembling ringmaster, throwing him backward to the earth with tremendous force.

CHAPTER II.

MR. EISENSTEIN WALKS OUT.

"God help us! The man is doomed!" roared Mr. Spratt, dropping the Roman helmet in his excitement. "Where's Hughes (the beast tamer connected with the show)? I'll break his neck for this!"

"Don't led him get at me! Don't led him get at me! Fader Abraham! he'll eat me alive!" shrieked the Jew, brandishing his spear from his retreat upon the top of the table more furiously than ever. "You can keep dose monish, mein goot freund Spratt. Keep dem all! Yes, keep dem all, only take dot plame peast away!"

As the manager started to run out into the tent in search of the beast tamer, the employees of the circus crowded in by the score.

There was a scene of the wildest confusion and all in one moment of time.

Shouts, yells, loud-spoken orders, and, above all, the roar of the infuriated beast.

Amid all this chaos Burt Leroy seemed to be the only one to keep his head.

Unless, indeed, it was his brother Rob, who, having stood nearer the door a little to one side, had become entangled in the frightened crowd of men and boys, powerless to act.

When the ringmaster had entered he had still carried his long whip in his hand, which he had suffered to fall upon the ground at the tiger's spring.

"Save me! My God, will no one save me!"

Thus from the blanched lips of the prostrate man the appeal for help went up.

It touched one brave heart if it touched no other.

Forgetting the cowardly attack made upon himself by this very man but a short while before, Burt Leroy seized the whip and sprang forward toward the tiger, who seemingly hesitated, now that his prey was actually within his grasp, pressing one huge paw upon his upturned breast, and giving vent to the most deafening roars.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

Three times in quick succession the lash of the whip descended, coiling itself around the striped back of the enraged feline.

It was enough.

With a louder roar than had yet been heard, the animal, releasing Winchell Hill, flung himself about, facing its new antagonist, lashing the earth furiously with its tail, and crouching for a spring.

Burt Leroy never winced.

With his eye fixed firmly upon that of the tiger, his manly young form displayed to its highest advantage in his suit of flesh tights, he held the whip aloft menacingly above the brute which he sought to control.

Would the power of this untrained eye prove successful?

It was to be doubted.

What the end might have been none could have foretold, had not Hughes, the beast tamer, at that instant dashed upon the scene.

"Clear the doorway!" he shouted.

"Crack! Crack! Crack!" went his whip, while the beast, recognizing his master, groveled at his feet like some huge tame cat.

Now, in less time than it takes to tell it all, this little interruption to the business of the manager of the Grand Consolidated with Mr. Moses Eisenstein was brought to an end.

The doorway was cleared instantaneously, and the tiger forced into a spare cage brought by willing hands.

"Burt, you are a brick—a veritable brick!" whispered Rob Leroy, admiringly, as he sprang to his brother's side.

"Pshaw! It was nothing, Rob. The old brute is on its last legs, its teeth are just ready to drop out. There's noise enough about him, but no fight."

"All the same I've no desire to have him tackle me, and I don't think Winchell Hill has, either. My! but didn't he turn the slick back spring the instant the tiger's paws were off of him! Never even thanked you, Burt, for saving his life at the risk of your own."

"I don't want his thanks," replied Burt Leroy, proudly. "Winchell Hill is a mean, contemptible fellow. If it wasn't for Mr. Spratt I wouldn't stay with the 'Grand Consolidated' twenty-four hours. You and I could get plenty of engagements, Rob, and—but hush! Here comes Hill now."

Was the surly ringmaster about to thank him?

Burt Leroy thought so, but he soon found out his error.

"You want to get them tights off and be ready to help with the packing, and blame quick, too," he said, grumpily, as he passed the twins.

"We are here on Mr. Spratt's business," flashed Rob; "when he is through with us you'll find us on hand."

"That don't make no difference, I want—"

"Thank heaven you are safe and sound, Hill!" exclaimed Manager Montmorency (otherwise Spratt), bustling in at that moment. "The brute is safely caged now, and I've given Hughes a tremendous blowing up for permitting the van to get into such a condition. You ain't hurt, I hope?"

"No—no, thanks to you."

"I owe you an apology, Hill, and as soon as I am through with this gentleman I will make it. Where is that helmet? It was thundering careless in me not to have looked out for it, tiger or no tiger. Ah, there it is, under the table. Now, Eisenstein, let's settle this thing quick."

While talking the busy little manager had been bustling

about, and he now stooped to pick up the Roman helmet which had been dropped at the first appearance of the tiger, falling neglected beneath the table upon which the Jew had sought refuge.

Meanwhile Winchell Hill strode from the apartment with a highly theatrical air of injured dignity.

It seemed to Burt Leroy that slight glances of recognition were exchanged between Mr. Eisenstein and the ringmaster as he passed.

"Get your documents ready, Eisenstein!" exclaimed Mr. Spratt, straightening up, helmet in hand. "Here's your money, and—Lord bless me! What does this mean? The money is gone!"

"Gone! gone!" cried Eisenstein, starting back from the table.

"Gone! gone!" echoed Burt and Rob Leroy, springing to the manager's side.

"Gone! Stolen!" breathed Mr. Spratt, in husky tones, staring at the empty interior of the helmet. "Burt—Rob! I am a ruined man!"

"Perhaps it has fallen out," suggested Rob, dropping to his knees and crawling under the table.

But the money was not under the table.

What was more, in spite of the most rigid search of Mr. Spratt, it could not be found at all.

What had become of it?

Pale and perspiring the manager stood before his creditor, whose countenance had grown dark as the unavailing search proceeded.

He had not tendered his assistance, nor except for his first exclamation uttered a word.

"Eisenstein, I am all at sea," said Mr. Spratt, feebly, at the same time wiping his perspiring brow. "You'll have to wait until to-morrow—I must find that money and—"

"Vait! I shall not vait!" snapped the money-lender, seizing his papers and stuffing them into his pocket. "Dis is fraud—dis is trickery. I don't beleef you ever haf dot monish. You fool me—you set your plame peasts on on me; I'll haf de law on you eef you pay not my monish now—you see."

"You are crazy, Eisenstein. These boys will bear witness that I speak the truth. I counted the money in their presence only last night."

"Huh! You tink I peleef your circus trash? You take me for von fool? I haf de sheriff on you by morning, an' don't you forget it. Mebbe dese poys steals de monish—vat's dot to me?"

"Get out of this tent, you hook-nosed scoundrel!" roared the manager, now thoroughly enraged.

"I von't get ovid! I vant my monish—I vant—"

But the irate remarks of Mr. Eisenstein were foredoomed to a sudden termination.

At a sign from Mr. Spratt, Burt and Rob Leroy suddenly seized him, and, despite of his struggles, hustled him unceremoniously out of the tent.

"I'll get sqvare mit you!" he roared, shaking his fist at Mr. Spratt, who had followed after. "You can't scheat me—I'll led you know dot. I own dis circus now!"

CHAPTER III.

THE FALL OF THE TENT.

"Hoop-la!" shrieked the clown. "Hoop-la—hoop-la," and Mlle. Zitella, the dashing equestrienne of Montmorency's Grand Consolidated Circus and Menagerie, having made the

last hoop of the circuit, sprang lightly from her horse, bowing to the audience again and again amid a furious storm of applause.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" shouted the ringmaster, "you will now have the opportunity of witnessing the celebrated Petry brothers in their wonderful acrobatic feats!"

And as the five acrobats, in flesh tights and spangles, bounded into the ring, began their performance, the ringmaster retreated behind the canvas partition, flung aside his outer garments, and prepared to don tights for himself.

"Horses ready, Rob?" he exclaimed to a youth clothed in the regulation circus riders' suit, who sprang to lend his assistance.

"All ready, Burt."

"Then we haven't a moment to lose. Help me on with these tights like a good fellow. Playing ringmaster and doing the bareback act at the same time requires sharp work, and no mistake."

How is this?

Is Winchell Hill no longer ringmaster of the Grand Consolidated?

Such is the fact.

The circus was now in Buffalo, exhibiting on a lot a little to the north of the tracks of the New York Central railroad.

Since the night of the events of the last chapter, Winchell Hill had not been seen by the company he had ruled with a rod of iron, and Burt Leroy, one of the twin riders of the ring, had been promoted to the dignity of ringmaster and general superintendent in his stead.

The "Grand Consolidated" did not wait for the arrival of the sheriff.

What might have been the action of Moses Eisenstein next morning can only be imagined, for when morning dawned all the vast paraphernalia of the circus found itself stowed upon special cars and was moving west over the Central road.

Nor was this other than as had been intended.

It was the last night of the exhibition in New York City, and at the time of the happenings upon which we have dwelt, preparations for removal were already well advanced.

What had become of the ringmaster was a mystery.

He had walked unceremoniously out of the tent after his encounter with the tiger, and at the time of the starting of the train, for some unexplained reason, had not shown up.

Mr. Spratt was furious.

The loss of his ten thousand dollars from the Roman helmet had not served to improve his temper.

Instead of finding himself in a position to look into his tangled affairs and institute as thorough a search for the missing money as he would have liked, the manager was obliged to take off his coat and go to work, under penalty of disappointing the good people of Buffalo, at which city the circus had been billed for appearance next night.

"Hill is discharged from this moment," he had said to the twins. "Burt, you shall be ringmaster if you can fill the position, and I'm sure you can. While you and Rob are riding I'll lend you a hand myself. That cranky vagabond shall never work for me again."

Thus it came about.

But in spite of his rush Mr. Spratt did find time to look again for the money. Every foot of ground within his private apartment in the great tent was gone over, but without avail.

The trunk was searched, Burt and Rob Leroy helped him pull over the great mass of properties, still the money was not to be found.

"Are you sure it was in the helmet when you took it out of the trunk?" Burt had asked.

Mr. Spratt was not sure. It had been there the night before when taking his twin favorites into his confidence he

had counted it in their presence; further than that he could not tell.

"Maybe the Jew took it himself while they were getting the tiger into the cage," Rob had suggested.

And indeed it had already struck Mr. Spratt that way.

"I must get out of the state as quick as possible, boys," he said. "If I don't old Eisenstein will serve an attachment of some kind or other on me as sure as fate. We are billed at Rochester, but I shall break the engagement and move directly on to Detroit. By the time we get through with our trip across the continent, if I have luck, I may be in a position to square accounts with Eisenstein. You can bet your life I'll take precious good care never to get into his clutches again."

So Burt Leroy became ringmaster.

He entered upon his new duties with a will.

Once on the lot in Buffalo he threw himself heart and soul into the erection of the tent, while Mr. Spratt looked after the arrangement of other details, and when the job was completed, Burt felt that it was as well done as though ordered by Winchell Hill himself.

This was fortunate.

By half-past nine a furious thunderstorm burst over the city of Buffalo, which tried the strength of the tent fastenings to their utmost.

The wind blew a hurricane, the rain poured in torrents.

Some of the more timid of the audience beat a retreat into the storm, but the majority, unwilling to lose the great bareback race act on four horses, to be performed by those prime favorites, the twin riders of the ring, laughed at their pusillanimous neighbors and remained.

"Heavens! Did you hear that crash?" exclaimed Burt Leroy, as with his brother's assistance he pulled the spangled shirt over his head. "That's the worst one yet. How the tent rocks! I tell you what it is, Rob, if the old shebang stands up against this storm I need never fear to boss a tent-raising again."

"Of course you needn't, Burt," replied his brother, loyally. "I'll back you against old Hill any time."

"What do you suppose became of him, Rob?"

"Blest if I can imagine. Got off on a spree most likely. Wouldn't be surprised a mite to have him show up before we left town."

"I'd be mightily disgusted then, let me tell you," replied Burt, who was chalking his shoes. "I'm ringmaster now, and I intend to hold my position."

"On in front, Leroy!" shouted the callboy, thrusting his head into the dressing-room.

The looked-for signal had come.

Out in the tent the audience were in a fever of expectation.

The acrobats had already retired, and Happy Joe, the clown, though doing his best with decrepit witticisms and aged jokes, could not prevent impatient calls for the "twin riders of the ring."

"Hurry up, for goodness sake!" whispered Mr. Spratt, appearing inside the curtain as Burt was in the act of mounting.

"Ready now!" cried Burt.

The word to start was given, and side by side four black horses, guided by Burt and Rob, standing erect in their glittering tights, with a foot firmly planted on each, dashed into the ring.

At their entrance the audience rose in their seats almost to a man, greeting the favorites with deafening cheers.

Around and around they flew, faster and faster, the horses keeping well abreast, those of Rob Leroy being, if anything, a little ahead.

It was an exciting scene.

Viewed by the glare of the flickering lamps the lithe forms of the twin brothers were displayed to their fullest advantage.

Burt, as he urged his horses on by pressure of the foot and words understood by the well-trained beasts, looked a veritable young Apollo; nor in graceful horsemanship or personal beauty was Rob one whit behind.

Now Burt's horses began to lead.

First ever so little, then more and more until they ran at least a full half length ahead.

Suddenly a deafening crash of thunder broke, and a blast struck the frail inclosure, which brought the ladies in the audience screaming to their feet.

Almost at the same instant the great tent collapsed, burying audience, horses and riders in one struggling mass beneath its folds.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WORK OF AN ENEMY.

"Help!" "Fire!" "Thieves!" "Keep your hands out of my pockets!" "The animals are loose!" "The tent is burning!" "Help! Help! Help!"

Such were the cries which proceeded from beneath the fallen tent inclosing Montague Montmorency's Grand Consolidated Circus and Menagerie, as the large audience attracted by the fame of the twin riders, and which had braved the storm to witness their performances in the ring, struggled to make their escape.

It was a scene of wild excitement and one destined to dwell in the memories of those who shared in it for many a day to come.

There lay the great circus tent, covering innumerable moving figures, the canvas rising here and sinking there, with the struggles of those beneath it, like a troubled sea in a heavy gale.

Men shouted, women shrieked, children rent the air with their piercing cries.

And with it all the rain came down in torrents, the lightning glared, the thunder crashed and rolled.

At one end of the canvas the more fortunate of the audience could be seen already crawling into the open, while others who had made their escape were assisting those less fortunate to do the same.

This was the part of the tent which had sheltered the audience.

The tier of seats had succumbed to the shock, and from the cries and groans which could be heard on every side, it was painfully apparent that many persons were injured, some, perhaps, killed.

At the other end of the tent the scene was none the less animated.

The circus "supes"—and there were more than a hundred of them—were already out from under the canvas.

Some, without waiting for orders, were dragging out the wheeled vans bearing the cages of the wild beasts, while others, rushing around toward the entrance, were assisting the audience to escape.

"Get the spare center-pole!" roared Mr. Spratt, crawling on his hands and knees over the sawdust of the ring in the direction of the "greenroom." "Lively, boys! Lively! Run her up lively or someone will be killed. Burt, are you alive or dead?"

"I'm all right, Mr. Spratt."

The manager, who was still down among the sawdust, found himself face to face with his new ringmaster, Burt Leroy.

"This is all your fault, or rather, my fault," he exclaimed

bitterly. "Nothing but ill luck follows me. If half the audience ain't killed I shall be lucky. I had never ought to let you put up this tent alone, Burt Leroy!"

"It ain't any fault of mine that brought it down, Mr. Spratt."

"Not your fault, but your ignorance, boy. Where's Rob? For goodness sake don't tell me that either of you are hurt, for you are the best drawing-cards I've got. How should you know the way to secure the tent, seeing that you never did it before."

"Rob's all right and so am I, Mr. Spratt. He's gone to the assistance of the ladies. I had just got the horses outside with the help of Riley, the clown, when I heard your voice calling. Good creatures! They stood as still as mice! But you mustn't blame me for this. I tell you the tent was as secure as though the raising had been superintended by Winchell Hill himself."

"Oh! I dare say!" answered the manager, in a way which showed that he believed just the contrary. "Here come the boys with the spare center-pole. We must raise her up somehow. Now then, lively, lively!"

"Hold on, Mr. Spratt! you can't raise her!" shouted Burt. "Half the ground pegs are out. You are only wasting time!"

"I say we can, and we must."

"While you are fooling someone will be killed."

"Say, boss, Mr. Leroy is right," interposed one of the tent-men. "You can never get her up in the world."

"Then get her down and out of the way entirely," yelled Mr. Spratt, who was running about like a crazy man. "This thing has ruined my Buffalo business. Confound the luck! I see plain enough this is going to be the worst trip I ever made."

It was evident enough that Mr. Spratt had lost his head entirely, and Burt saw that if anything was to be accomplished he must do it himself.

He accordingly put himself at the head of affairs, and before ten minutes had elapsed matters were straightened out as well as circumstances would permit.

Fortunately for all concerned, the drenching rain had prevented the danger of fire.

Probably this saved many lives.

When the great canvas was removed at last it was discovered that no one was seriously hurt, or if any had been they, at least, had not remained to tell the tale.

The fallen benches were cleared away, and such of the audience as had been pinned beneath them left free to regain their feet.

The animals were all run beneath the stable tent, which, fortunately, had remained intact.

The costumes and properties used in the street procession were covered with canvas to keep them from the wet.

"No more show to-night, gents!" shouted Manager Montmorency to the crowd that hovered around.

The crowd dispersed slowly and grumblingly, thinking themselves exceedingly ill-treated, no doubt.

"Have you seen anything of my brother?" Burt demanded of Mr. Spratt, when he found himself with time to breathe.

"Not a thing. I thought you said he went out to help the audience?"

"So he did, and I haven't seen him since."

"It's very strange. I hope nothing can have happened to him. Burt, I'm feeling just sick over all this. I can't stand up against it any longer. Our Buffalo business is ruined, and I think under the circumstances I shall move at daylight to-morrow morning. There won't be a baker's dozen in the house to-morrow night, everyone will be afraid."

"Oh! I don't think so. It will only advertise us the more. The tent ain't hurt a bit, except the main pole which, as might

be expected, is broken. Take my advice, Mr. Spratt, and let me put her up again."

"But I ain't fit to do it myself, Burt."

"I can do it."

"Do you think so?"

"Are you afraid to trust me, Mr. Spratt?"

"Well, to tell the truth, after what has happened, I am."

"I tell you again, Mr. Spratt, it was not my fault. I took every precaution. I wish Rob were only here to bear me witness. If you don't believe me, ask anyone of the tentmen, they'll tell you it is just as I say."

"Tut, tut, Burt, don't get excited," interposed the manager, wearily. "I have every confidence in your good intentions, my boy, but you lack experience. The trouble was, you didn't secure your fastenings properly. The wind got under the canvas and the strain was too great for the center-pole and away she went."

"But I made sure of every fastening. I examined each one twice."

"You thought you did, but we won't discuss it. Perhaps, after all, it will be better to put the tent up again and stay over to-morrow. It might prejudice the public against us if we didn't keep our engagement as billed. You see, Burt, I'm just crazy to get outside the limits of the State of New York. There's no telling what Eisenstein's next move will be, and—Thunder and Mars! Who the demon has been at work here?"

While speaking Mr. Spratt had put his arm through Burt's and led him toward that part of the ring where lay the great center-pole of the tent.

There was a little group of the attaches of the Grand Consolidated clustered about the pole, talking excitedly.

This the manager had observed, hence his movement toward them.

Something had been discovered, and he naturally desired to know what that something was.

One glance served to tell the story.

The cause of the accident had revealed itself to Burt Leroy even as the exclamation of the manager was made.

The central tent pole had neither been uprooted by the force of the gale, nor had it—as until now had been the assumption—broken off short.

Someone had helped matters along by sawing the great pole more than halfway through.

Under these circumstances it was not surprising that the tent had fallen. The only wonder was that it remained upright in face of the storm as long as it did.

CHAPTER V.

A HOST OF STRANGE HAPPENINGS.

But where, all this time, was Rob Leroy?

There was a saying in the mouth of everyone connected with the Grand Consolidated that if you wanted to find one of the twins the quickest way was to look for the other.

They were invariably together.

If, moreover, one was found alone, it became a difficult problem to know what name to give him, since it was next to impossible to tell the young riders apart.

It was unlikely, then, that at such a time Rob Leroy would absent himself from the scene of action without some excellent reason.

Rob had an excellent reason.

At least he thought so.

The reason was intimately connected with the most sensitive portion of that young man's anatomy—the heart.

Never until the moment his eyes fell upon that beautiful, upturned, girlish face, upon those bright black eyes which looked so appealingly into his own, had Rob known what the word love meant.

Not that he fell an instant victim to the poison from Cupid's arrow.

If anyone had told him so he would have laughed.

Nevertheless, when he saw the girl lying there upon the sawdust, pinned down by a fragment of the fallen tier of benches, Rob leaped to the rescue with alacrity, clambering over the intervening obstructions in a manner which would have put Petry Brothers, the circus tumblers, to the blush.

The fact was, Rob Leroy had noted this beautiful face before.

The young lady had occupied a seat in company with a dudish-looking escort, well down toward the front, and on two occasions earlier in the programme, when Rob was doing his act, he had imagined that those eyes looked upon him with more than usual interest—but perhaps this was only imagination after all.

"Are you hurt, miss?"

Rob had torn aside the broken planks and was kneeling by the young lady's side.

"I—I don't think so. I am dreadfully frightened! Oh! where is Mr. May?"

She was very pale, and exclaimed wildly.

Whoever "Mr. May" might have been, he had evidently taken himself off, for the nearest of the crowd were some five feet away, each looking out for his or her own interests and paying no heed to the gentle sufferer at all.

Just then the eyes closed and the face assumed a deathly pallor.

Evidently the young lady had fainted.

Rob caught her in his arms and bore her through the ring beneath the fluttering canvas to the ladies' dressing-room, which, being in a separate tent, fortunately remained intact.

By the time he had gained this shelter, and even before good Mrs. Hanks, the ladies' "dresser," had opportunity to relieve him of his burden, those eyes had opened and looked into his own again.

"I am all right—at least I shall be in a moment," she murmured faintly, as Mrs. Hanks bent over the couch upon which Rob had laid her. "What a terrible thing! Is anyone seriously injured. I ought to be ashamed of myself for giving way so, when I'm not hurt at all."

Now, although Rob Leroy knew that duty demanded his presence elsewhere, he could not tear himself from the door of the ladies' dressing-room, until he had received the assurance of Mrs. Hanks that his fair charge was not injured in the least.

"She says her name is Ethel Tucker, and that she lives on Delaware avenue," whispered the "dresser," confidentially. "The galoot what brought her here seems to have skipped out and left her. Someone will have to get one of them hacks outside and take her home."

Someone!

Rob Leroy had no idea of allowing that someone to be any other person than himself.

Miss Tucker announced that she would be only too deeply grateful.

In a twinkling Rob had changed his clothes and brought the hack around to the door of the smaller tent.

Never had Rob Leroy spent a more delightful hour than the one passed by the side of Ethel Tucker in that hack.

"You must come in for a moment, Mr. Leroy," the young lady remarked sweetly, when the vehicle came to a stand at last before one of Delaware avenue's most magnificent residences. "My father will never forgive me if I allow you to

go without giving him an opportunity to thank you for perhaps saving my life."

"I—I think I had better not," stammered Rob. "You overestimate my services, Miss Tucker. Really, what I did was no more than what any gentleman would have done under the circumstances. There was no danger."

"I am not so sure of that. I was so wedged in under the seat that I could not help myself, and there is no knowing what might have happened if you had not come to the rescue as you did. Positively, Mr. Leroy, I shall not take no for answer—you must come."

What could Rob do?

Though rigidly maintaining the dignity of their respective positions, Rob Leroy and Miss Tucker had chatted freely during the ride.

From the young lady Rob learned that her father was one of the rich grain merchants of Buffalo, a fact which greatly interested him, since his own dead father had carried on the same business, dealing largely with Buffalo, as Rob could just recall, away back in his boyhood days.

Of course, Rob would have been overjoyed to prolong the interview indefinitely had it been possible; but it was quite a different thing, this presenting himself to be thanked by a stranger at a little before midnight.

Still Rob Leroy did not like to be impolite, and there was nothing for it but to take Miss Tucker at her word.

He was shown into an elegantly furnished parlor, where, after a moment, Mr. Tucker joined him.

Miss Ethel, much to Rob's disappointment, did not reappear.

The greeting of the grain merchant was frank and cordial.

In a few brief sentences he thanked Rob for the service rendered his daughter, and offered to pay any expense he might have incurred.

"There is nothing to pay, sir."

Rob flushed up to his temples.

What he had done had not been done with hope of reward.

Pronouncing a hasty good-night without giving Mr. Tucker a chance to respond, he moved toward the door.

"One moment, young man. You are not offended?"

"It's of no consequence, Mr. Tucker, but my services are not for sale."

"Whew! I see I've put my foot in it. Look here, young man, I'm a thousand times obliged to you. You are a plagued sight more of a gentleman than young May, who escorted Ethel to the circus and abandoned her at the moment of danger. If there is anything I can do for you I want you to let me know. Do you stay over another night in Buffalo? I'll engage a full house for your performance, if you do."

"I believe so—I cannot say," replied Rob, eager to be gone, now that it had become evident that he was to see no more of Miss Ethel. "I'm only one of the performers, and can't tell you what change in our plans this accident may bring about."

"You'll see me in the front row if you do," said Mr. Tucker, enthusiastically. "There's nothing I admire so much as fine horsemanship, and I am told the twin riders of Montmorency's circus can't be beat. By the bye, what's your name?"

"Rob Leroy, sir."

"No, no. I mean your real name—not the one you go by in the profession."

"But that's my real name, sir."

"Are you telling me the truth, young man?" exclaimed the grain merchant, with increased earnestness. "My most intimate friend was Burton Leroy, of Utica; was he anything to you?"

"Burton Leroy was my father, Mr. Tucker."

"Your father! You amaze me!"

"It's true just the same. My brother Burt and I were his only children. He died ten years ago."

"Yes, yes, I know. But how is it that Burton Leroy's sons

are circus performers? I never could have believed it—never in the world."

"It is an honorable profession, Mr. Tucker," responded Rob, both surprised and perplexed at the strange turn the conversation had taken.

"Yes, yes. I suppose so, but it ain't usually chosen by lads in your position in society. You had plenty of means, why then—"

"Plenty of means!" echoed Rob. "You are making a mistake, sir. It must be some other Burton Leroy beside my poor father whom you have in mind. He was killed in a railroad accident, and when his business was settled up it was found that there was just enough left to pay his debts. For a long time Burt and I were knocked about among our neighbors, until finally we drifted into circus riding, and—"

"And you have made a success of it, for which you have a perfect right to be proud," interrupted Mr. Tucker, with altered manner. "Look here, young man, there is something very strange in all you tell me. It needs looking into. To my positive knowledge your father was possessed of large means when he died. I shall examine into this. Where can I see you, in case I should want an interview in a few weeks? I don't want to raise your hopes, but—"

"But what, Mr. Tucker?"

"No matter. I haven't another word to say until I know what I am talking about. Your father was my friend. To-night's happenings may prove a most fortunate thing for you and your brother. You can give me your address."

"We shall be at Chicago on the 1st of July, sir."

"Good. Expect to hear from me. Meanwhile, don't raise your hopes too high, lest you meet with disappointment. Good-night."

"Good-night," answered Rob, much mystified.

In another instant Mr. Tucker's door had closed behind him, and Rob Leroy stood in the street.

To say that he was perplexed don't begin to express the state of the young man's feelings.

Rob was puzzled to the last degree.

At the time of their father's death—their mother had died during their infancy—the twins had found themselves without a relative to care for them, and so far as anyone knew, without a penny to their name.

To be sure, Mr. Leroy had always lived in good style and had been supposed to be very comfortably fixed.

About a year previous to his death he had closed out his grain business and embarked his entire fortune in some speculation in New York City.

Strangely enough, he had left no papers behind him disclosing the nature of his investments, and those who saw fit to interest themselves in the boys had never been able to find out what the speculation was.

When Burt and Rob reached the age of fourteen a letter had been received by the neighbor who at the time had them in charge—they had been kicked about from pillar to post ever since their father's death—coming from Mr. Spratt and offering to receive them as apprentices to the circus profession, the writer stating that he made the application at the suggestion of a friend.

To make a long story short, the boys went, and with Mr. Spratt they had been ever since.

Upon entering Mr. Tucker's house, Rob had dismissed the hack, since to retain it for the ride back would have made altogether too heavy a drain on his slender purse.

With his mind full of what had occurred, he now started on his long walk to the circus grounds, reaching the place at a little before one.

It caused Rob no surprise to find everyone connected with the vast establishment awake and moving about, since he

understood perfectly that the accident must be repaired that night.

The main entrance to the circus tent was on the side of the lot opposite to that from which Rob approached, and as the performers' entrance was around at one side, the young man decided to go in by way of the menagerie tent, which was nearest, and thence to the ring, where he had no doubt his brother would be found.

To his surprise he found the menagerie tent deserted.

Even Hughes, the keeper, whose business it was to be on hand at all times, was not to be seen.

"Whew! What would the old man say if he knew this!" muttered Rob, as he hurriedly crossed the open space.

The exclamation had scarce escaped him when, from behind the canvas separating the menagerie from the main tent, there came a sound which seemed to fairly freeze him to the earth.

It was the roar of the lion belonging to the menagerie.

Not that Rob was unfamiliar with the sound.

He had heard it a thousand times, but not as he heard it now.

Before him stood the lion's cage, empty and with the door open.

The roar came from the circus tent, and quickly following upon it came the shout in the voice of Mr. Spratt!

"Climb the pole, Burt! Climb the pole! You are a lost man if you don't!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE LION LOOSE.

"Someone has sawed that center-pole!" roared Mr. Spratt. "If I can find the scoundrel who did it I'll break every bone in his carcass, by thunder I will!"

Someone had sawed the center-pole of the main tent of the Grand Consolidated—it could be seen with half an eye.

"Do you know anything about this, Riley?" demanded the irate manager of the clown, who formed one of the group. "Why don't you speak up, some of you? I'll discharge every man in the circus, and give up our summer's business entirely, but I'll know the truth!"

It was a foolish speech.

The more so since every man who heard it knew that Mr. Spratt meant precisely what he said.

To quote the clown, Manager Spratt was a "holy terror when he got his mad up."

It looked very much as though Mr. Spratt had got his mad up just at that particular time.

"It must have been done between midnight and morning," said Burt Leroy, who had stooped and was examining the pole.

"What time did you quit work on the tent?"

"Half-past eleven, sir."

"You are sure the pole was all right then?"

"I am positive. I superintended the putting up of it myself. You don't think I would leave it in a condition like this?"

"I know very well you wouldn't. This is the work of some jealous scoundrel who don't want you to be ringmaster, but it will avail nothing. I'll let him know that I'm boss of this circus. I'll make who pleases me ringmaster. Who watched in the main tent last night?"

"Pat Delaney."

"Where is he now?"

But oddly enough, no one could give any account of Pat Delaney.

He had been seen just before the accident. Now that he was wanted he could not be found.

Those who had gathered about the ruined pole assured Mr. Spratt of their entire innocence.

Riley, the clown, had but just discovered the cause of the accident as Burt and the manager came hurrying up.

"I want every one present to understand that, although Pat Delaney's may have been the hand which cut that pole, his was not the brain which conceived the scheme," said the manager, more calmly. "I'm sick and I'm in trouble, and you all know it, but make no mistake, I'll learn the truth yet. Now then, up with this tent. Fetch that spare pole. You tentmen, arrange the canvas! Get the lines ready. This tent goes up to stay until I am ready to have it come down, or I'll know the reason why."

In an instant all was hurry and bustle, yet not the slightest confusion occurred.

Every one had his own poles to raise, his own pegs to drive, his allotted portion of the canvas to attend to, and his seats to erect in a certain section of the tent.

Everything went like clockwork, and while Mr. Spratt gave his orders Burt, by direction, saw that they were duly executed.

In less than an hour the work was accomplished, and no trace of the accident remained.

Although extremely busy, Burt Leroy was not without time to be uneasy about his brother.

Of course he was all right, but just the same, no one of whom he had found opportunity to make inquiry had seen Rob.

Burt never once thought of going to the ladies' tent and asking Mrs. Hanks.

"That's the talk!" cried the manager, as he stood beside Burt, who was still clothed in his riding-tights in the center of the ring. "We'll see now who dares to meddle with that pole again. Burt, pick up that rope, will you? The ring must be kept clear. Smithers, you and Flannigan watch here to-night. Arm yourselves. Shoot down the first man who dares to show his nose in this tent. I don't give a continental who it is!"

And thus saying Mr. Spratt picked up his coat, which he had removed during his unwonted exertion, flung it over his arm, and was about to retire to his own apartment, when a loud cry from a distant part of the ring caused him to start back with horror written on his face.

"The lion's loose—the lion's loose!"

It was announcement unnecessary.

At the same instant a deafening roar, which seemed to fairly shake the tent, burst upon their ears.

Not only was the lion loose, but he was heading directly toward the center-pole of the tent, beside which Burt and the manager stood.

"Great heaven, what next?" breathed Mr. Spratt, in horror. "Get a gun, someone! Call Hughes! The only way is to shoot him, and it must be done quick!"

But no one paid any attention.

The "supes" ran this way and that. Riley, the clown, with a face as pale as death, sprang over the rope and bounded up the tier of benches like a deer.

At this instant the beast gave vent to the roar which had startled Rob Leroy.

It was louder and even more terrifying than the first.

On came the lion with fearful bounds.

Mr. Spratt was over the rope now and shouting to Burt to save himself, as his brother had heard.

There was the great tent pole close beside him, to climb which would have been child's play for the young athlete, but still Burt Leroy never moved.

The lion was worth five thousand dollars if he was worth

a cent. It was doubtful even if he could have been duplicated for twice that sum.

"Keep quiet!" shouted Burt as he nimbly dodged the spring of the infuriated beast. "Don't let anyone shoot. I'll fix him! Trust to me!"

Even as the words died from his lips he leaped nimbly upon the back of the lion which had now turned and was crouching for a spring.

Already the brave boy had twisted the rope he held into a great noose, and, balancing himself upon the back of the lion as coolly as though it had been his own horse, Burt essayed to fling the noose about its neck.

CHAPTER VII.

BURT SEES WINCHELL HILL.

Fancy the feelings of Rob Leroy as he peered through the canvas door connecting the menagerie with the main tent!

Burt was already on the lion's back and was trying his best to get the rope noose about the animal's neck.

It fairly took poor Rob's breath away to watch him, making him feel, as he afterward expressed it, "as weak as a washed-out rag."

There was nothing he could do to help Burt.

There was nothing to do but to leave the bold fellow alone or shoot Mr. Spratt's most valuable lion.

Rob knew very well that were he to attempt to interfere Burt would never forgive him for the act.

He consequently stood motionless and silent, watching his brother with beating heart.

Nor was Rob the only watcher.

Upon the empty benches outside the ring Mr. Spratt, Happy Joe and the rest stood contemplating Burt's movements with the deepest interest, no one uttering a sound.

It was an exciting scene.

The lion at the moment of Burt's bold jump found himself taken completely by surprise.

A man on his back was something the beast was not used to.

In vain he tried to shake him off, to turn and seize him between those terrible jaws, springing as he did so now to the right, now to the left, lashing his tail from side to side, now and again breaking the stillness with deafening roars.

To make matters more interesting, the other beasts in the menagerie tent seemed to know instinctively that something was wrong, although, of course, they could see nothing that was happening in the ring.

The lioness roared in concert with her partner; the tigers snarled, the hyena howled and the panther cried like a child.

It was a perfect bedlam of sounds, but, as Rob could see, it did not affect Burt in the least.

What the boy had to fear more than all else was that the maddened beast would lie down and roll. As long as he could keep him on his feet and moving he knew that he was safe.

How did he manage this?

Bless your heart, I'll never tell you.

You see, I wasn't there, and only tell the story as it was told to me.

He did it somehow, and in a quarter the time I have spent in describing it had the noose about the neck of the brute and had drawn it tight, as, leaping well out of reach of the lion's paws, he flung himself down at last.

"Hurrah! You've got him!" shouted Mr. Spratt, springing into the ring and seizing the rope. "Burt Leroy, you are a trump! More than a trump—my right bower! What in the

world I would have done without you these last few days, goodness only knows."

"Don't pull that rope so hard, Mr. Spratt. You'll choke him to death. Can't you see he can hardly breathe?"

Happy Joe, Rob and the rest had rushed in now, and all took a hand in holding the lion down.

"I don't care anything about that, so long as you are safe," cried the manager, giving the rope an extra tug.

"But I do, then. I don't want to have had my risk for nothing. Here, give me hold of that rope. I'd have had him in the cage by this time if you'd only let me alone. Ah! thank goodness, here's Hughes at last."

The sudden arrival of the beast tamer, who came rushing into the ring with his hair fairly standing on end, quickly settled it.

He was none too soon.

If Mr. Spratt had been given a moment more at the rope he would have certainly succeeded in putting a fine finishing touch to Burt's bold undertaking by choking the lion to death.

Hughes, though pale and evidently in a terrible rage about something, did not lose his head.

Kneeling by the side of the lion he loosed the noose, and peremptorily ordering all hands from the ring, soon had the beast safely back in his cage.

Then came the storm.

"What in thunder did you want to go away and leave things so, for?" roared Mr. Spratt, making almost as much noise as the lion.

"If it hadn't been for Burt, I'd have been thousands of dollars out, to say nothing of the chance of some of us being killed."

"Mr. Spratt, I—I haven't a word to say, sir. I've been tricked—fooled. Someone is working against me. Discharge me, if you like. I—I shan't blame you, but I declare to you, sir, that I left that cage securely locked."

"The door was unlocked when I came through," interposed Rob. "I saw it myself."

"Where have you been?" shouted the manager.

"A boy came running in and told me you wanted to see me down at the wagons on the other end of the lot."

"A boy—what boy? I've been here in the main tent all the evening."

"I don't know the boy, sir. Never saw him before. Thought he might be a new hand you had picked up. It's all my fault, I know."

Loud words, angry discussion, protestations from Hughes.

They kept it up for half an hour without coming to any conclusion other than that the same malignant hand which had sawed the tent-pole had been at work again.

No doubt Mr. Spratt would have discharged the beast tamer if he had dared.

As a man of Hughes' qualification was not to be picked up every day, he hesitated to do this, and vowing vengeance upon everyone, save the twins, Mr. Spratt retreated to his own apartment and to bed.

Neither Burt Leroy nor his brother Rob slept much that night.

They bunked together in a small tent, known as the "dormitory," with the subordinate members of the company. The lady riders, the tumblers and principal performers slept at a neighboring hotel.

Burt and Rob could have shared in this privilege had they so desired, but having slept in the circus tent for so many years, now that they had become famous as riders, they still continued the practice from choice.

Rob had his story to tell, and Burt found it necessary to talk about the affair of the tent pole.

They were still discussing these matters when the sound

of a pistol-shot suddenly rang out upon the stillness of the night.

"Great Scott! What's that?" cried Rob, raising himself in alarm.

"Someone prowling about the tent," echoed Burt. "Mr. Spratt told the watchman to shoot the first man he saw there, and, by George, that's just what he's done!"

Burt was on his feet and out of the bunk before Rob could answer.

As he had not taken the trouble to undress himself, there was no time lost.

The dormitory was separated from the main tent by a considerable space.

As Burt sprang from beneath the canvas, he saw the watchman running toward him pistol in hand.

"There he goes! There he goes!" he shouted, pointing toward a man's flying form, which could be dimly seen making tracks toward a roundhouse near the railroad, some distance away.

"Who was it?" demanded Burt. "Did you hit him?"

"Faith, an' I don't know, sir. I seen his head coming under the canvas an' I let drive. I think I must have missed him by the way he runs."

There was no use in attempting to follow the intruder.

Burt saw at a glance that he had entirely too good a start.

He saw something else, too, which caused him no little uneasiness.

There was a locomotive standing upon the track not a great way from the roundhouse, and as the man passed before the headlight, he turned for one instant and looked behind him.

The movement served to reveal his face to Burt Leroy with startling plainness.

It was the face of the ex-ringmaster, Winchell Hill!

CHAPTER VIII.

SEIZED BY THE SHERIFF.

"Walk right in, ladies and gentlemen! Walk right in and witness the wonderful act of Signor Spandalini, the great, the only Sicilian sword swallower, the man with the iron stomach, who eats glass for breakfast, stones for dinner, and takes a two-edged sword regularly for his tea. It's only ten cents, and won't take you a moment. Last chance to see this marvelous man before the show begins!"

The shouter of the sideshow connected with Montmorcency's Grand Consolidated Circus and Menagerie paused for breath at the end of this long speech, and, driving two ragged urchins away from the door of his little tent near the main entrance to the circus, stood aside to make way for a young lady and her gentleman escort whom he fondly imagined good for ten cents apiece.

It was in the great Western city of Chicago, on the old circus lot on the "North Side," just off of Dearborn avenue, not far from Lincoln Park.

The time was early in the month of July, and the circus, after many adventures, had at length pitched its tents for a week's stay in the city by the lake shore.

"And how has it fared with our twin riders, Burt and Rob Leroy, during the time which has elapsed?"

Well—very well!

The watchman's shot had apparently put an end to Manager Spratt's mishaps, for from that time until now nothing had occurred to mar the success of the show.

Cleveland, Toledo, Detroit, Toronto, and other large cities were visited, as well as many smaller places, in each one of which the fame of the twin riders of the ring, properly her-

alded by the advance agent, did not fail to draw admiring crowds.

The season had been a successful one, yet somehow Mr. Spratt, who was a man of extravagant habits and reckless expenditures, had not seen his way clear to make up the amount necessary to satisfy the mortgage on his circus.

It is true that he might have done so if he had been of a more prudent nature, but in a show of the magnitude of the Grand Consolidated there are always a hundred calls for money, and the much-tried manager, somehow or another, could not seem to get a thousand dollars ahead.

Now that distance separated him from his angry creditor, he seemed to have dismissed the matter from his mind.

"It will be time enough to settle with Eisenstein at the end of the season," he said to Burt one day, when his favorite made allusion to the matter.

It was a happy-go-lucky way of doing business, but it was Mr. Spratt's way, and Burt, of course, let the matter drop.

And right here it may be as well to mention that nothing whatever had been seen of Winchell Hill since that night in Buffalo.

Was the sawing of the tent-pole and the loosing of the lion actually the revengeful work of the ex-ringmaster?

Burt and his brother Rob were sure of it, Mr. Spratt doubtful.

The fact was, the manager did not believe the man seen by Burt to have been Winchell Hill at all.

The shouter for the sideshow was mistaken in the matter of the two ten-cent pieces.

The young lady and her escort, unallured by the attractions he had to offer, walked directly past him to the ticket-box of the main tent.

It was afternoon, and a matinee already in progress.

As luck would have it, Jones, the ticket-seller, was sick and away from his post, and Mr. Spratt, having his own hands full, had placed Burt in the box, leaving Rob, for once, to ride alone.

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Leroy. This is Mr. Dawkins. We have come to see you ride."

Certainly Burt Leroy had never in all his life heard so sweet a voice nor seen a face more lovely.

But who was it?

The young lady who spoke was an entire stranger to him.

Burt fumbled with his tickets nervously, blushing up to the roots of his hair and answering only with a polite bow.

"You do not seem to recollect me," said the young lady, looking a little perplexed and blushing in turn.

"Really, miss, I have never had the pleasure—"

"Is it possible that you have forgotten the night the tent fell down in Buffalo?"

Could this be Miss Ethel Tucker?

Ever since the arrival of the circus in Chicago, Rob had been on the anxious seat to hear from his Buffalo acquaintances and talked of them constantly.

That he had been mistaken for his brother, Burt saw at once.

"I think it must be my brother you refer to," he answered.

"I am Burt Leroy. I presume I have the pleasure of addressing Miss Tucker, of whom I have often heard my brother speak."

It gave Burt particular pleasure to be able to say this, for he could see the face of Mr. Dawkins darken jealously—he had responded to the introduction with an icy bow.

"How provokingly stupid of me," replied the young lady, laughing. "Yes, I am Miss Tucker, and I certainly should have taken you for your brother anywhere. Can I see him for a moment, sir?"

"Ethel! you forget yourself!" cried her escort, pushing al-

most rudely in front of her. "Two reserved seats, if you please."

"My brother will be in the ring in a moment," said Burt, handing out the tickets without apparently noticing Mr. Dawkins' offensive manner. "After the performance he will be only too happy—"

"Ethel, I protest against you holding further conversation with this person!" cried Mr. Dawkins, glaring fiercely. "What would your father say? What—"

"Cousin Sam, you are acting in a very ungentlemanly manner," flashed the girl, interrupting him. "Mr. Leroy, I am staying at the Grand Pacific with relatives. Father will be in Chicago in a day or two and desires that both you and your brother shall call on him. Meanwhile he intrusted me with this. Good-afternoon."

And as Miss Tucker placed upon the shelf of the ticket window a great legal-looking envelope her irate escort, who had seized her arm, almost dragged her away into the tent.

"Phew!" whistled Burt. "What a stunning girl! How mad I made that dude, too. Rob, my boy, I don't wonder you're in love. What have we here? News of a fortune! Won't Rob open his eyes!"

In fact, so great was the young man's curiosity excited that he was unable to restrain himself.

It was not to be supposed that there would be many more tickets sold that afternoon, so locking the cash-drawer, Burt turned the ticket-box over to the temporary care of Signor Spandalini's head shouter and went off to seek his brother in the tent.

Of course, Rob was immediately excited.

As it was almost time for his bareback act, the brothers could only speak together for a moment, but this was long enough to enable Rob, to whom the envelope was addressed, to open it when out fell a \$5,000 check.

It was Burt who picked it up and discovered its size.

How the boys did stare!

There was also a letter from Mr. Tucker, in which he stated that he had made investigation into their dead father's affairs, and should have some wonderful news to communicate in the course of a very few days.

"Meanwhile allow me the privilege of advancing to you and your brother a trifling sum," the letter continued. "You must close your engagement with the circus at once and prepare to enter upon a life becoming your wealth and station. I don't say that the matter is absolutely certain yet, but I feel so sanguine that I have no hesitation in loaning this money, nor need you in accepting it. If it turns out after all that I am mistaken, I shall never trouble you for its return."

"Look here, Burt, I can't take this money?"

"I don't think we ought to, Rob, but— Hello, what's the matter with you?"

"There's a feller in the ticket-box, sir," whispered the door-keeper, who had come running in breathless. "He's driven Bill Rakes out, and is breaking open the cash-drawer. There's two policemen with him, an' he says he's deputy sheriff of Cook county, with a writ of attachment against the old man!"

CHAPTER IX.

ROB FINDS IMMEDIATE USE FOR HIS \$5,000 CHECK.

During the next few hours there was in and about Montgomery Montmorency's Grand Consolidated Circus tent what the boys used to call when I was a boy "a high old time."

Of course, the audience knew nothing about it—not one of them even suspected it.

Miss Ethel Tucker, under the escort of her foppish young

cousin, Sam Dawkins, left the tent at the close of the entertainment, thinking it very strange that Rob Leroy, for whom, much to the disgust of Mr. Dawkins, she had taken no pains to conceal her admiration as he went spinning around the ring on horseback, had not found time to come around to the front and pay his respects.

In her own mind Ethel attributed this neglect on Rob's part to be the cavalier manner with which her cousin had treated Burt in the ticket-box; and, disappointed at not having been afforded the opportunity to shake hands, at least, with the handsome young rider, made things decidedly entertaining for Cousin Dawkins all the way back to the hotel.

Of the true state of affairs Ethel had not the faintest suspicion.

Behind the scenes all was confusion, and yet, thanks to Ringmaster Leroy's careful training, the performance went straight ahead without a break.

"The sheriff's got the old man. There's a keeper in the box!"

Like wildfire the words were passed from mouth to mouth. Meanwhile the deputy sheriff had seized all the cash in the ticket-box and served upon the wretched Spratt a formidable document headed:

Moses Eisenstein, Plaintiff, vs. James Spratt, Defendant.

Order of Attachment.

Following which was the usual formula: City of Chicago, County of Cook, beside a second document equally formidable in appearance, instructing the sheriff of said county to appropriate any and all property belonging to the defendant which could be found.

How had Eisenstein managed it?

Spratt was no lawyer and could not tell.

First he showed fight, but finding that of no use, hurried off downtown to consult a lawyer on his own account, leaving the deputy and his keepers in charge of the tent.

During that hour of confusion the twins had neither opportunity nor inclination to speak to the manager of their own affairs.

In fact, both Burt and Rob were deeply puzzled.

There was something so strange in the mysterious hints thrown out by Mr. Tucker, to say nothing of the loan of the \$5,000 check, that neither of them knew exactly what course they ought to pursue.

"Anyhow I shan't leave this circus till I've seen the old man through the season," said Burt to his brother, stoutly. "He's been as good as our own father could be to us, and has had nothing but trouble ever since we started out. I, for one, ain't going to do anything to make matters worse."

"I'm with you whatever you do," Rob had replied, and just at that juncture Mr. Spratt, very hot and excited, came steaming in.

The boys were seated in the manager's private room, where they had undertaken to keep guard over the keeper to see that he made no attempt to pry into Mr. Spratt's books and papers.

As it had got to be so now that Mr. Spratt could take no step without consulting Burt, the boys found themselves in close conversation with the kind-hearted, but inefficient manager at once.

"It ain't one mite of use, Burt," were his first words. "I've consulted my lawyer and Eisenstein's lawyer. The miserable old fraud had suit started against me two months ago in this county in anticipation of my arrival. I've either got to raise \$5,000 between this and twelve o'clock to-morrow or be sold out by the sheriff in the afternoon.

Five thousand dollars!

It was precisely the amount of the check.

It seemed a shame to hold onto that wretched slip of paper

when to hand it over to Mr. Spratt would prevent the threatened sale.

"I can raise the money in New York if they would only give me time," continued Mr. Spratt, gloomily. "Of course, the circus is worth many times that sum, but who is going to bid on it? There's the rub! My credit is good for nothing. It will be knocked down to Eisenstein for a mere song just as sure as fate."

"Is Eisenstein here?" asked Burt, in surprise.

"He is. He is staying with a brother of his who keeps a clothing store away out on Blue Island avenue. It seems he's settled here, has bought an interest in a grain elevator, and joined the Board of Trade."

"Why didn't you go out and see him and ask him to hold off?" suggested Rob.

"Because it wouldn't be the slightest use in the first place, and for fear that I might lose my temper and do something rash in the second. No, no, boys, it wouldn't do. I was a fool to put myself in the power of such a man. I might have known how it would end."

Then, as the conversation continued, Rob for the first time told Mr. Spratt of his adventure in Buffalo, and of its sequel, the \$5,000 check.

The manager listened to the story with a great appearance of interest.

"You ought to have told me all this sooner, boys," he said. "I should have made it my business to have seen this Mr. Tucker and had a talk with him. If it really turns out that there is property coming to you it would be very strange."

"It's just as he says, people all thought that father ought to have left money," said Burt.

"And yet Eisenstein assured me that you were poor orphans."

"Eisenstein!" exclaimed Burt and Bob in a breath.

"Why, yes. It was he who urged me to take you. Did I never tell you?"

"Never."

"I have so many things on my mind that I suppose I forgot it. He said that he didn't know you nor you him, that he was doing it to oblige a friend."

"It is all very mysterious," mused Burt, "but I suppose it will be explained when Mr. Tucker arrives."

"I shall make it my special business to have it explained, you may depend, but I say, boys, you don't think of leaving me?"

"Of course not."

"Would it be asking too much to request the loan of that check until I can make a raise? It's just the amount I need, and I am certain to get the money in course of the week."

"If you think we have any right to use it, I am willing," said Rob.

"I don't see why you haven't the right; beside, I shall make it good to you before Mr. Tucker arrives. Burt, what do you say?"

Burt said yes—he could not refuse; and it was agreed that he should take the check out to Mr. Eisenstein's address at once.

"I hate to go myself for fear of trouble," said Mr. Spratt. "If you will do this for me depend upon it I shall never forget it. Get a receipt and an order to have the keepers removed."

"On second thought, Rob had better go, for I can't very well spare you, Burt."

Rob accordingly made himself ready and set out for Mr. Eisenstein's address forthwith.

He took the Clark street car to the corner of Washington street, there changing to the one which runs out on Blue Island avenue.

It was late when he started, and by the time he reached his destination nine o'clock had passed, and the clothing store

over which the sign of Israel Eisenstein was displayed was found to be closed.

"You will find Mr. Moses Eisenstein down at the office of his elevator," said the young Jewess, who opened the hall door in response to Rob's ring. "It's right at the foot of that alley on the river bank, you can't miss it if you were to try."

Rob followed the direction and hurried down the lonely alley toward the great elevator in the office of which a light could be seen burning.

When he tried the door he found it fastened; when he knocked it was presently opened and there before him, scowling malignantly, stood his old enemy Winchell Hill.

CHAPTER X.

A PAIR OF PLOTTERS.

It would have been decidedly interesting to Rob Leroy could he have been a listener to the conversation which was taking place in the office of Moses Eisenstein's new grain elevator at the moment of his knock.

But Rob's ears, as Sam Weller might have said, not being "double h'extra power h'audiphones, but h'only h'ears," they were unable to hear what was going on behind a door down a passage, and behind a second door, which communicated with the office itself.

Besides, the most interesting part of the conversation took place long before Rob knocked on the door at all.

The speakers were Moses Eisenstein and the ex-tyrant of the "Grand Consolidated," Winchell Hill.

It was long after working hours, and everyone connected with the elevator had gone home, leaving not even a watchman behind.

You see the elevator was being thoroughly overhauled for its new owner. For some time previous it had been closed, and as it was not yet in shape to receive grain, only one watchman was deemed necessary, and this one taking umbrage at the exceedingly offensive manner of his new master, had packed himself off that evening in a huff.

It was this circumstance which brought Moses Eisenstein to the office at night.

He had just taken off his coat, lit a cigar and started in to examine a batch of bills for repairs on the elevator, when the door opened and in walked Winchell Hill.

"Hello, Eisenstein!"

"Mein freund, goot-evening. De sheriff did his duty, huh? Have you heard?"

"Oh, yes, he captured the cash box and raised the mischief generally. I'm told that old Spratt flew around like a hen with her head cut off. He was going to thrash the deputy at first, but thought better of it afterward."

"Ha! ha! ha! Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the Jew. "How I would have liked to haf been dere! Vell, vell, my freund, I puy dat circus sheap by to-morrow. Spratt cannot raise de money. Everywhere in Chicago I haf let it be known that he borrows but never pays."

"That's all right as far as it goes," said Hill, taking off his coat, with the air of a man who proposed making himself at home. "Got a cigar, Eisenstein?"

"Plenty, plenty. Dere's de pox—hellup yourself."

"How about making me ringmaster?" demanded the ex-ringmaster, helping himself not only to one cigar, but to a handful, which he pocketed on the sly.

"Vell, vell, I haf no objections. You know vat I tole you."

"That as soon as I could find means to place those two young upstarts, Burt and Rob Leroy, where they would never

turn up to interfere with you again, you would put up a job to oust Spratt and give me a half interest in the circus."

"Dat's de size of it," snapped the Jew. "Dat's de size of it. Spratt must go—I said it in New York already. I wait for you to do your part, but you do it not. Shall I wait longer, huh?"

"I tried it on in Buffalo. I fixed it so the lion got loose—"

"Ta! ta! ta! Dot vas all schild's play. If de lion had both twins eat up I would haf been satisfied; but vat goot in rehearsing failures? Look-a-here, bouncing dem poys von't do. Dey must be pounced off de planet, see?"

"What have you against them, Eisenstein?" demanded Hill, not in the least disturbed by the cold-blooded villainy of the Jew's rapid speech.

"None of your peezness. I tole you dot pefore. De twins must go—see? Dey must go quick—see? I haf more reason now dan as ven ve talked over dis matter in New York. I'm going into peezness in Chicago and it von't do to have old matters brought up against me—see?"

"Yes, yes, I see. You needn't ask me twenty times."

"You promised me dose poys should be fixed long ago."

"Well, I thought they would be, but I was mistaken, it seems. How much will you give in cash beside the half interest in the circus? I don't propose to sell myself too cheap."

"Sheep! Sheep! Vat you want—de earth? Haf I not given you half dot money you saw me take from the Roman helmet the night the tiger got loose? I vas a fool to do dat. Never tought you vas looking. It vas de vorst kind of a give-away for me."

"Ha! ha! ha! Didn't I catch you nice?" roared Hill. "Well, well, you needn't regret it, Eisenstein—it brought us to an understanding, and we may be useful to each other. It's smart fellows like you and me that get ahead in this world. But I say, no one can hear us, I suppose?"

"Dere's not a soul apout de bremises."

"Good enough. Now, then, what do you propose?"

"Vat do I bropose? I've made my broposition and I bropose to stick to it. If a half interest in de Grand Consolidated von't satisfy you, vy, all dere is apout it I get somevon else to do de job."

"Oh, pshaw! no you won't."

"I say I vill. You can't plackmail me beyond a point, my freund. I tole you vat I'll do—don't monkey mit me no more."

"But, man, you seem to forget that there's such a thing as hanging for murder," said the ringmaster, in a low voice.

"Hire de job done den."

"Not much."

"Please yourselluf."

"If it could only be made to seem like an accident, now."

"You've tried that."

"You are right; it didn't work. I tell you what, Eisenstein, if you get possession of the circus at the sale to-morrow, you just make me manager, and I'll engage to rid you of those boys before long."

"I von't do anything of de sort. You carry out your part of de agreement first, or—"

Rat! tat! tat! Rat! tat! tat!"

There was someone knocking at the office door.

"Heavens! I hope no one has overheard us!" breathed Winchell Hill, in a frightened whisper. "Who do you suppose it can be?"

Instead of immediately answering, the Jew arose abruptly, walked on tiptoe toward the window and took a hurried look into the alley without.

"Fader Abraham! If it ain't one of dose poys now!" he exclaimed in a low tone.

"You don't say so! Which one is it?"

"How should I know? I can't tell dem apart. Look-a-here, now's your schance!"

"I don't see it."

"Den I do. Dere's no one in dis elevator but ourselves. De poy has come from Spratt to beg time of me, no doubt. Suppose—"

Here the voice of Moses Eisenstein sank into so low a whisper that it was only with difficulty the other could hear what he said.

"Do you mean it?" breathed Hill, turning pale.

"Of course I mean it. Ha! dere he goes again!"

Rat! tat! tat! Rat! tat! tat!

The knocking had been repeated even louder than before.

"Shall I open the door?" demanded the ex-ringmaster, in low, strained tones.

"Yes, eef you mean beezness."

"Think of the risk."

"Ta, ta! Dere is no risk."

"Well, here goes then. Mind, now, it's a half interest—no less."

Thus saying, Winchell Hill passed out into the passage and hurried toward the outer door.

CHAPTER XI.

A DASTARDLY DEED.

Hello, Rob Leroy! What in the world brings you here?"

The tone in which the ex-ringmaster addressed Rob was so pleasant as to throw Mr. Spratt's young messenger completely off his guard.

"Good-evening, Mr. Hill. I never expected to find you here. It's Mr. Eisenstein I wanted to see."

"Eisenstein? What do you want to see him about?"

"I've got a message for him from Mr. Spratt."

"Well, he's upstairs in the elevator somewhere looking after some repairs that were done to-day. How's things at the circus?"

"All right."

"Heard the sheriff had levied on the old man?"

"I suppose you know all about it, Mr. Hill, since you are here."

"Well, yes. Eisenstein told me. You see, he's bought this grain elevator, and I'm going to run it for him."

"You?"

"Certainly; why not?"

"Oh, nothing, only I didn't know that you understood the business."

"You didn't, eh? Well, what's the matter with learning? How's Burt?"

"He's first rate."

"Had a good season?"

"Yes, so far."

"I hear Burt is ringmaster now; is that so?"

"Yes. You lit out and left the old man in the lurch?"

"I was sick and tired of his whims and crotchets," replied Hill, who somehow seemed possessed of a strange desire to prolong the conversation. "You see, Rob, Eisenstein is an old friend of mine. I knew he was going to buy out this elevator, and since he promised to make me manager, I thought I might as well quit the circus first as last."

"That was the way of it, was it?" said Rob, who was beginning to grow tired of so much talk with a man he both detested and despised. "Can I see Mr. Eisenstein? I'm in something of a hurry."

"What did you say you wanted to see him about?"

"I didn't say."

Rob had not the faintest idea of communicating his business to Winchell Hill.

In the first place he felt that the matter did not concern

him, in the next he suddenly recollected that the \$5,000 check was drawn up on a Buffalo bank to his own order and that he would have to indorse it.

If he showed the check to Hill, what would he think?

The man was mean and spiteful enough to cast doubts upon its genuineness.

Perhaps Mr. Eisenstein would refuse to accept it, and the object of his mission fail.

"You might as well tell me," continued Hill. "It's dark and dusty up in the elevator and the stairs are steep. I can take your message to Mr. Eisenstein and perhaps save you the trouble of going up."

"I prefer to see him myself."

"Well, just as you say. Wait here while I go and find Eisenstein and tell him you want him. I won't be long."

Then Winchell Hill shut the door in Rob's face and locked it, leaving the young rider standing on the steps.

What had come over Rob Leroy?

Somehow he seemed possessed with the desire to turn and hurry away.

He could only account for it by the unexpected meeting with Winchell Hill, upon whom he had devoutly hoped never to set eyes again.

What had brought the man here?

Was his story about having been engaged to run the elevator for Mr. Eisenstein true?

In his heart Rob Leroy doubted it.

It was exceedingly improbable that so shrewd a business man as the Hebrew money-lender would engage a person wholly inexperienced to fill a position so important.

Far more likely was it that Eisenstein expected to take possession of the circus next day, and make Winchell Hill manager of that.

"The old man has got a hard one to deal with," thought Rob. "I'll bet a dollar Eisenstein won't accept the check. Mr. Spratt ought to have given the matter into his lawyer's hands instead of sending me."

The moments passed, and with their flight Rob's uneasiness increased.

How lonely the place was.

The alley leading down from Blue Island avenue descended abruptly and was very dark, making it a matter of difficulty to see the houses on the street from the spot where he stood.

Before him was the great elevator with its slated sides, so high that Rob found it necessary to throw his head far back in order to see the top of it; behind was a high-board fence inclosing a vacant lot, while just ahead was the bulkhead overlooking the river, where could be seen rising in dark outline the giant frame of a lake steamer and a schooner or two.

There was not a living thing in sight.

Taken all in all here was about as choice a location to dispose of a man with a \$5,000 check on his person as Rob had ever seen.

In the midst of these lugubrious reflections footsteps were heard inside the passage, the door was opened and Winchell Hill appeared before him again carrying a lantern in his hand.

Mr. Eisenstein is upstairs and very busy, Rob," he said, in tones unusually pleasant for a man who bore the reputation of never speaking a pleasant word.

"You see he is in such a tremendous hurry to get the elevator running that he has had men working here nights all the week. If you want to see him, he says you'll have to come up where he is."

"All right," answered Rob; "I'll go. How high up is he?"

"On the fourth story. Are you good at climbing? You'll need to be before you get there, I promise you that."

"If a circus man can't climb he don't amount to much, Mr. Hill."

"Ha, ha! Good—very good! That's so! Come on, Rob. Keep close behind me now and look out you don't stumble. I'll hold the light low down so that we may avoid pitfalls. Fact is, I ain't over used to this place myself just yet."

"Upon my word, I wish he wouldn't be so disgustingly pleasant," thought Rob. "I despise the man so that I hate to talk to him—but what's a fellow going to do?"

And in truth it was a hard matter to avoid speech with his guide.

As they traveled up steep stairways, covered with dust, and along dark corridors lined with cobwebs, the tongue of Winchell Hill seemed to run like a millrace.

He talked of Rob's riding and praised it, said all sorts of complimentary things about Burt, and even had a good word for the unfortunate Spratt.

"It was a shady piece of business on the part of Eisenstein to spring this thing on the old man," he said, confidentially, "though you needn't say I said so; that's my opinion. I was just telling him he ought to let up on Spratt. If you go at him right, maybe he will."

Now was Rob's opportunity to speak of the check, but he restrained himself.

Just then they came to the top of the fourth flight of stairs, and he began to look about him for more evidence of the presence of Mr. Eisenstein and his workmen, but could neither see nor hear anything which seemed to indicate that they were anywhere about.

"How much further is it?"

"Not far. Eisenstein is at the other end of the building on this floor. Here, take a look at the city by night. There's a splendid view from here."

There was an open window close by the head of the stairs.

Setting the lantern on the floor Winchell Hill moved toward it, Rob following him without once dreaming of the dastardly intentions lurking in the man's black and treacherous heart.

There, as he leaned out of the window, he could see the great city with its myriads of lights spread out beneath him; there—Great heavens! what was this?

Even as he gazed, Rob felt his legs suddenly clutched by powerful hands.

In a twinkling he was forced through the window, and felt himself flying downward through space.

CHAPTER XII.

BURT MAKES A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

"Ha! ha! ha!" shrieked Happy Joe, the clown, as he came gamboling into the ring that night, ten minutes behind the time of his proper "entrance."

"Ha! ha! ha! Funniest thing ye ever heard in your life, ladies an' gentlemen. Stepped outside to see a man, an' met my old friend Lish Hartshorn. 'Lisha, how de do,' says I. 'Don' know you. What's yer name?' says he. 'My name is Joe—plain Joe,' says I. 'Some folks calls me Happy Joe, because I'm always a laughin'; sure you hain't forgot me—"

And here Happy Joe launched off into volumes of words which had neither wit, point, nor anything else to them, while the audience laughed as people will laugh when they go out for an evening's amusement, without knowing why.

"Heavens and earth! What ails Riley?" whispered Manager Spratt, calling his young ringmaster aside.

"Acts to me very much as though he had been drinking, sir."

"That's just what I think. The callboy couldn't find him when it was his time to come on. The rascal! I'll bounce him—I will, by Judas! He's making a perfect ass of himself! Call that stuff he's getting off funny business! If it wasn't for making matters wuss'n they are I'd go into the ring and knock him Galleywest!"

There wasn't any doubt that Happy Joe had been imbibing too freely.

Not only was his voice thick and his jokes ridiculous, but it was as much as he could do to crack his whip and perform his usual antics in the ring.

"You can quit right now, Riley!" roared Mr. Spratt the instant the luckless clown left the ring to make a change in his dress required in a certain act.

"Don't you go back there, mind now! Leroy, see that he leaves the tent at once. If I can't boss my ticket-box, by thunder! I'll boss the ring. No swizzling clown can go on while I'm about."

"I ain't drunk," retorted Joe.

"Yes, you are."

"I say I ain't. What's more, I ain't takin' no orders from you—you—musty, fusty old Spratt! Winch Hill will be running this circus to-morrow, an' don't you forget it, neither."

"What?"

"Oh, I mean it. I know what I'm talking about—take your hand off'n me, Burt Leroy. Your goose is cooked, an' so's your brother's, too. Winch Hill and his friend Eisenstein 'll fix you both."

Of course, these were only the words of an intoxicated man, but just the same, they kept forcing themselves back into the mind of Burt Leroy long after he had hustled Happy Joe into the "dormitory," and put him in charge of a brawny "supe," with instructions to keep him out of sight and hearing of the irate manager until he had sobered up.

Mr. Spratt was fairly wild.

Having in former days been a clown himself, he was forced to make hurriedly ready and play that role the best he could during the remainder of the evening's entertainment.

It was all over finally, and the last of the audience gone, but still Rob Leroy had not returned.

"What can have happened?" Burt asked himself for the hundredth time.

Again came the words of Happy Joe rushing back to his memory:

"Your goose is cooked an' so's your brother's, too. Winch Hill and his friend Eisenstein 'll fix you both."

Burt did not like it.

Something must have occurred to keep Rob so.

It looked bad that Happy Joe, who had always been the particular crony of Winch Hill, should in his intoxicated moments indulge in a speech like that.

Burt spoke to Mr. Spratt about it the first chance he got—it was then nearly eleven o'clock—and they hurried to the dormitory, only to find the clown in a dead sleep, and in no condition to tell them anything even had he been so disposed.

"Burt," said Mr. Spratt, gravely, "there is something wrong in all this. Drunken men and fools often speak the truth where lying would pay them better. I feel very much worried about Rob, and wish with all my heart I hadn't sent him on that errand. If Hill really has a hand in this affair—but pshaw! it is impossible. Still, you'd better go at once and see what's become of your brother. I'd go with you, but one of us must stay here—you know that yourself."

This broke Burt up worse than ever.

Usually Mr. Spratt took a hopeful view of matters which did not too intimately concern himself, and to know that he felt worried seemed additional cause for alarm.

"I'll saddle Brown Dick and ride over, I guess," he said, uneasily. "It will take less time."

"I would," replied the manager. "Of course you know the way?"

"Oh, yes; I've often been in Chicago before, you know."

"Well, off with you. I don't doubt in the least that Rob will be here and ready to laugh at us both by the time you return."

Burt tried to hope so, finding it hard work.

Brown Dick, one of the fleetest horses in the circus stables, carried him over the ground with great rapidity, and as it was plain sailing in the streets at that late hour, he reached the required number out on Blue Island avenue before twelve o'clock.

There was no difficulty in finding the place, but although he pulled the bell handle almost out of its socket and thumped on the door until he was tired, Burt could obtain no answer to either knock or ring.

Once he heard a slight movement behind the window-blinds above him, as though someone was endeavoring to look out.

When he called aloud that he wanted to see Mr. Eisenstein the noise ceased and all was still.

Now, what possessed Burt Leroy to think of turning down the alley which led to the elevator he would have found it difficult to tell.

It was one of those uncontrollable impulses which sometimes seize us, hard to explain even to ourselves.

To be sure, he recollected hearing Mr. Spratt say that the Jew had purchased the elevator, but this in itself seemed hardly reason enough to suppose that any tidings of his brother could be had by simply gazing up at its lofty front.

Nevertheless, Burt was seized with the notion to go, and he went.

He had already fastened Brown Dick to a neighboring lamp-post, and leaving him where he was turned into the alley and hurried down to the river front.

The office of the elevator was entirely dark, and not a soul to be discovered anywhere about.

Burt now became possessed of some idea of looking up the watchman, of whom he could make inquiry as to Mr. Eisenstein, and in the hope of finding some such person walked along the little wharf between the elevator and the river, keeping his eyes open in all directions as he advanced.

That was how he came to spy it.

It was lying on the wharf close to the string-piece upside down, as though it had fallen from a height.

Burt seized it with an exclamation of horror.

"Great heaven! Can Rob have been inveigled down here, and thrown overboard!" he breathed.

Well, he had reason to think so!

What he had found lying on the string-piece was the hat of Bob Leroy!

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SALE OF THE CIRCUS.

"Ten thousand! Going at ten thousand! At ten thousand dollars for the best equipped circus in the United States! Gentlemen, it is ridiculous—absurd! Not to be thought of for a moment. Come now! What gent will be the first to set the ball a-rolling and give me a better bid?"

It was on the floor of the Chicago Real Estate Exchange in Dearborn street.

The time noon, or slightly after, on the day following that upon which the circus had been seized.

A dozen or so well-dressed, "solid"-looking men with high

white hats tilted back upon their heads, and for the most part smoking cigars, moved about the floor here and there, or stood talking together in groups, paying little or no attention to the auctioneer as he shouted out these words.

"Don't all speak at once!" cried a red-faced man who stood beside a short, stout, pompous-looking Hebrew, close under the raised platform upon which the auctioneer stood.

Then somebody laughed, and somebody else remarked that Montague Montmorency's Grand Consolidated Circus and Menagerie must have been doing a poor business to let the sheriff catch it thus early in its trans-continental tour, and the shouts of the auctioneer began again.

Over in one corner stood Mr. Spratt, looking pale and worn as though he had not slept a wink all night.

He would not trust himself to look at Moses Eisenstein and Winchell Hill—the red-faced man and his Hebrew friend—although the former, who was strutting about, talking in a loud, offensive manner, did his best to catch the manager's eye.

Now Mr. Spratt's face did not belie him.

The manager of the Grand Consolidated had not only been deprived of sleep the night previous, but had not taken one moment's rest during the day.

The cause was ample.

It was owing to the unexplained absence of his twin favorites—Burt and Rob Leroy.

Burt! Was he missing also?

He was indeed.

From the moment when Mr. Spratt had seen him vault upon Black Dick's back and ride away from the circus late the night previous, Burt Leroy had not been seen.

Long before morning Mr. Spratt had grown too uneasy to stand it any longer.

Hurrying down to the Central Police Station on Kinzie street, he had communicated the facts to the officer in charge, and with a well-known detective had gone out to Blue Island avenue at once.

The journey proved useless, and only served to place the unfortunate manager in more unhappy relations with his creditor than before.

Eisenstein was routed out of bed, and a terrible scene followed between them.

Spratt accused the Jew of underhand work in connection with the boys' strange disappearance, while Eisenstein denied having seen the boys at all, threatening all sorts of revenge.

"I vill haf you arrested for defaming mine character!" he had shouted, shaking his fist in the manager's face. "You say I touch dose poys! Den I say you lie! It is all a trick—a scheme! You nefer sent dem to me mit a \$5,000 sheck! Pah! It is absurd!"

Now what Mosen Eisenstein may have thought when it came to his knowledge that Rob Leroy was possessed with a check for so large a sum at the time of Winchell Hill's dastardly assault, we cannot say.

What the detective thought, and what he said and repeated again and again, was that the possession of the money had proven too great a temptation for Rob and his brother, and that they had gone off together, as he expressed it, "on a high old spree."

Mr. Spratt could not agree to this.

He knew the twin riders far too well.

That something serious had happened he felt positive, and between his efforts to interest the police in the matter and his frantic endeavors to raise the means to buy in the circus at the coming sale, the much-tried manager was fairly wild.

Now the time had come, and the auction was in progress.

Mr. Spratt, who had managed to interest his lawyer to the extent of being willing to risk a certain sum, stood nervously watching the result.

"Come, gentlemen, come! Speak up!" shouted the auctioneer. "The property is well known, and it is equally well known that ten thousand is a ridiculous sum to offer for it. Speak up, and let's hear a decent bid."

"Twelve thousand," said the manager's lawyer, quietly, without looking around.

"Fifteen thousand!" shouted Eisenstein. "I buys de circus eef I pay tree hundred tousand. 'Tain't no use to pid against me, you'll see."

"Fifteen! Give me twenty! Fifteen! Give me twenty!" rattled the auctioneer. "Gentlemen, this is all wrong. No bid short of five thousand can be received hereafter. Why, the menagerie alone is worth a hundred thousand dollars. It could not be replaced for half as much again."

"Twenty-five thousand!"

This from the lawyer.

"Tirty tousand!" roared Eisenstein.

"Thirty-five!"

"Forty!"

"Forty-five tousand, und dot vas orter settle it!" screamed the Jew. "It's a plame sight more monish dan Spratt has got!"

"Look here—is your name Spratt?" asked one of the spectators, suddenly approaching the manager. "How is this that your circus is up at auction? I thought you had one of the best-paying shows in the land. I was coming out to see you this afternoon about those two young riders of yours, Burt and Rob Leroy."

Mr. Spratt stared.

"To whom have I pleasure of speaking?" he began.

"My name is Tucker," replied the stranger. "Horace G. Tucker, of Buffalo. You may have heard of me from Rob Leroy."

Mr. Spratt had heard of the rich Buffalo merchant, and he told him so.

He also explained hastily the nature of his difficulties, and also the strange disappearance of the twins.

Meanwhile the bidding had progressed.

Sixty thousand had been offered for the "Grand Consolidated," by Mr. Spratt's lawyer and as this happened to be his limit he turned to consult the manager, as the auctioneer called out the name of the Jew.

"Sixty thousand! Come, Mr. Eisenstein, what ails you? Sixty thousand! sixty thousand. Going at sixty thousand! Why, upon my word if Eisenstein hasn't lit out."

Now it so happened that until that moment Mr. Tucker had not heard this name mentioned.

"Eisenstein—Eisenstein!" he exclaimed. "Is that the name of your creditor, Mr. Spratt?"

"It is."

"Moses Eisenstein, of New York?"

"Yes."

"And to this man you sent Rob Leroy last night with my check?"

"It was, Mr. Tucker. I ought not to have attempted to borrow of the boy, I know, but——"

"Hold on!" cried Mr. Tucker. "It ain't that. Where is Eisenstein? Is he here? This thing must be looked into. Moses Eisenstein has good reason for wanting those boys out of the way. Which is he? Show him to me. I——"

But to point out the Jew at that moment would have been a difficult matter.

By this time all present had become interested in the bidding on the circus, and quite a crowd had gathered about the auctioneer's platform.

As Mr. Spratt scanned their faces hastily he saw to his surprise that the Jew was not among them.

For some unknown reason Mr. Eisenstein had hastily taken

his departure, and Winchell Hill with him, leaving the Great Consolidated to be bought in by the manager's lawyer on the sixty-thousand-dollar bid.

CHAPTER XIV.

ROB FALLS INTO BAD HANDS.

Chicago is a curious place.

Like New York, its principal streets are never quiet night nor day—there is always someone moving this way or that from the going down to the rising of the sun.

Perhaps the quietest portion of the city by night is by the river bank, far down on the South Side in the immediate vicinity of the great grain elevators, and yet even there it is not always quiet, nor was it so on the particular night of Rob Leroy's accident, when, a short while before that unfortunate occurrence, the stillness was broken by three pistol-shots.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

The watchman at a certain elevator, situated a short distance further up the river than the establishment recently purchased by Moses Eisenstein, had discharged his revolver at the two rough-looking men discovered prowling about the office door.

"It's a couple of them blamed river thieves," he panted, as he came running along the wooded platform in front of the elevator. "Which way did they go, now? I certainly saw them. They must have taken to their boat."

The watchman was right.

Although he kept his eye fixed upon the turbid ditch which boasts of the name "Chicago river" for some little time without catching a glimpse of the marauders, no sooner was his back turned than out from behind a great lake steamer a boat shot forth and moved with great rapidity down the stream..

There were two men in the boat and they pulled for all they were worth, never pausing to look behind them until the shadow of the planked sides on the opposite bank had been gained.

Then one of the pair, addressing his companion as Bill, remarked, as he filled a pipe, that they had had a close call.

"Bet your life," was the brief response. "Told you it was too early, Reddy Cook. Mebbe next time you'll believe me. Only for our laying behind that there steamer we'd had a bullet in our hide sure."

"Who was telling you? Mebbe the thing was not loaded after all."

"Don't you fool yerself. Didn't I hear the ball go whizzing by my nose? I guess yes, an'—Holy Gimminie! What's that?"

That was a splash, and a very loud one.

Intent upon their conversation, neither Bill, the river thief nor his "partner," Mr. Reddy Cook, had been particularly observant of the grain elevator past which they were just then engaged in pulling their boat.

"Something dropped, you can bet your life!" whispered Bill, laying back on his oar.

"What do you s'pose it was?"

"Blest if I know. Sounded like a man, but no one could ever jump in from the platform there by the elevator with a noise like that. Hold up! It is a man! Don't you see his head just a-comin' up out of the water? There he is close alongside the boat."

Certainly Reddy Cook must have been blind if he had failed to see.

Between the boat and the elevator platform, within arm's length of the former, there rose to the surface of the water at this instant the form of a boy.

It was poor Rob.

Had the two river thieves been less intent upon their own affairs just at that particular moment they must have seen his terrible fall from the elevator window to a certainty.

As it was they only heard the splash.

When Rob's body rose to the surface his eyes were closed, and his condition one of utter helplessness.

When the two men drew him into the boat he was entirely unconscious—scarcely breathing.

"Now blame me if this ain't the blamedest!" whispered Reddy Cook, as he gazed upon the still, white features of the youth in the bottom of the boat. "Where do you suppose he came from, Bill?"

"Blest if I know. Must have dropped off the wharf. I can't see a soul around."

"I tell you it ain't so. A fellow could never drop off the wharf with a splash like that. He was pitched in as sure as you're alive, and the fellow what done it has skipped away."

Though the man spoke the truth, as we know, there was certainly no evidence of it.

It was all quiet just then about Mr. Eisenstein's elevator, for Winchell Hill, the instant his dastardly action was performed, had closed the window and hurried off down the stairs without so much as an effort to ascertain its result.

"Is he dead, do ye think?" asked Bill, bending over the boy. "'Cause if he is, we'd better dump him as soon as possible. This here ain't no place for us."

Indeed, so fully alive were the two river thieves to this latter consideration that, without waiting to further inquire into the matter, they resumed their oars and pulled down the river to a considerable distance before further investigation was even attempted.

"Blame me but the boy is dead," was the first remark of Reddy Cook when he ventured to put his hand on Rob's heart at last.

"Then we ain't got nothing to do with him only to go through him," answered Bill. "'Twon't do for us to say nothing, Reddy. Our own reputations is entirely too shaky. There's been foul play, but 'tain't none of our biz. What's the kid got onto him. Now's the time to see."

"Here's a nobby gold watch and chain fer one thing," was the reply, as the light-fingered Mr. Cook possessed himself of the articles in question—the gift of Mr. Spratt.

"No scarfpin, I see."

"No; he's only got a fifty-cent tie."

"How about the pocket?"

Even as Bill spoke his partner had thrust his hands into the pockets of Rob's pantaloons.

A handkerchief, a knife, a few keys, and some small change were all he discovered.

"Try the coat," whispered Bill. "That's the last—then we'll dump him. Dead or alive, he ain't no good to us."

Cook thrust his hand into the inside coat pocket and drew out an envelope.

"That's all theré is here," he answered.

"What's in it?"

"Nix, I guess; it's as thin as a water, and— Well, may I be blowed!"

"What now?"

"Oh, nuthin'. There ain't nuthin' in this envelope—oh, no! Nuthin' only a \$5,000 check on the Fust National Bank of Illinois!"

CHAPTER XV.

BURT IN A BAD BOX.

We all know what happened to Rob Leroy that night, and as a consequence his absence from the tents of the "Grand Consolidated," no matter how great the uneasiness it gave

rise to in the mind of Mr. Spratt, can have caused the reader no surprise.

Not so Burt.

We left that young man standing upon the wooden platform overlooking the Chicago river in front of Moses Eisenstein's elevator, holding the hat which had dropped from poor Rob's head at the moment of his terrible fall.

"Rob's hat! It is Rob's hat!" was the exclamation which instantaneously escaped him.

It was Rob's hat—there was the trademark of the New York hatter upon the lining at whose shop, as Burt knew, Rob had purchased this hat at the time he himself had bought the one he then wore.

To find it thus upon the platform was almost conclusive evidence that Rob had been there—that some accident had occurred of the most serious kind.

"Great heaven! What can have happened!" breathed Burt.

Ah! if he had been but a few hours earlier! If he had only reached that platform at the time Reddy Cook and his partner Bill heard that tremendous splash!

But stop!

If we are going to bring ifs into the question we might as well put it: Oh, if Rob had only not come to the elevator at all!

It is only consuming valuable time.

But Burt was far too seriously disturbed to waste time in idle wishing.

It was after midnight in a lonely part of the city.

Something serious had clearly happened to his brother, and his first thought was to seek help from the police.

What had brought Rob to the elevator was something Moses Eisenstein must know, and something, moreover, which he must be made to tell.

Not even yet did Burt suspect the baseness of the Jew's nature, which had prompted Winchell Hill to seek Rob's life, and which, should occasion offer, would prompt the ex-ringmaster to seek his own.

Now, the opportunity was destined to come sooner than Hill expected.

When Burt, mounted on Black Dick, came thundering up to the clothing store on Blue Island avenue, Winchell Hill and Moses Eisenstein, having hastily turned their backs upon the scene of the crime, were sitting together in the little parlor above the store, smoking and drinking, discussing the affair and planning to purchase the circus next day.

It happened that Israel Eisenstein, the proprietor of the store, was just then in the East buying goods; that his wife and daughter had gone to a party; that the servant was out, leaving Hill and the money-lender in charge of the house alone.

It does not matter just what was said.

Eisenstein heard the knocking, of course, and spied Burt through the half-turned blinds.

When the boy hitched Black Dick to the lamp-post and turned into the alley leading down by the elevator he saw that, too, and the outcome of it all was that when Burt Leroy hurried off of the platform and started back up the alley there stood Moses Eisenstein and Winchell Hill blocking the way.

"Here, you! Dis is brivat broberdy! Vat you prow about here dis dime of night for, huh?" called the Jew in his most offensive tone.

It didn't scare Burt a bit.

The sight of Winchell Hill in Eisenstein's company had conveyed some suspicion of the truth to the boy's mind already, and he pushed boldly toward them demanding to know what had become of Rob.

"Say, Eisenstein, I'll be blest if it isn't one of them Leroy boys!" exclaimed the ex-ringmaster, in well-feigned surprise.

"What the mischief brings you here at this time of night, Leroy, and which are you, Burt or Rob?"

"I didn't address you," flashed Burt. "Mr. Eisenstein, you know me now if you didn't before; where's my brother? That's what I want to know."

"Your brudder? How I know vere your brudder is? Vat you vant here?"

"But Rob was here. He came from Mr. Spratt to bring you a check for the money he owes you some hours ago and 'had not returned to the circus up to the time I left."

"He not vas here. I peleaf you lie. Spratt send me a scheck by a circus poy. A likely ting!"

"Well, it's a true thing then. Do you mean to tell me that you haven't seen Rob? I'm almost crazy for fear something has happened to him. See, here is his hat, which I just discovered around upon the platform in front of the elevator. If Rob hasn't been here what do you make of that, I'd like to know?"

Burt did not fail to observe that Winchell Hill and the Jew exchanged glances, but, of course, could not guess the thoughts passing through their minds.

Thus, when their manners altered suddenly and both questioned him with a great show of interest, he was taken completely off his guard.

"Mr. Eisenstein and I have been out for a walk, Burt," the ex-ringmaster said. "We thought we saw someone go down the alley, and followed after to see who it was. This is a very singular thing you tell us about Rob. Come, let us go round on the platform and see what we can find."

It might not have deceived one older and more experienced, but it did most completely deceive Burt Leroy.

Unhesitatingly he accompanied the two men around upon the platform.

Eisenstein led the way, Hill and Burt came behind.

"Where was it you found the hat, do you say?" asked the latter, when they had gained the platform, "somewhere about here?"

"Right there," said Burt, unsuspectingly.

He had scarce turned to point out the spot when Winchell Hill had him by the throat.

"Quick, Eisenstein!" breathed the ex-ringmaster, as, flinging his whole weight upon Burt, he bore him down upon the platform. "I've got him. He can't budge a peg. What's to be done?"

"Schoke him, my tear! Schoke him!" hissed the Jew. "Confound dem poys! dey haf already droubles enough make mit me. Schoke de life out of him, and drust me for your reward!"

It was of no use for Burt to attempt to struggle, and cry out he could not.

The whole weight of Winchell Hill's body was upon him—that awful grip about his throat prevented his uttering a single cry.

He had been taken unawares.

Had it been otherwise the treacherous ringmaster would have found in Burt Leroy no mean antagonist.

As it was, almost no time had elapsed ere the boy, to all appearance, ceased to breathe.

"I've done it, Eisenstein," whispered Winchell Hill, rising at last. "That makes two to-night. The boys are both out of your way now, Eisenstein, and I shall hold you strictly to your promised reward."

"And you shall haf it, my tear—you shall haf it. You are sure he's dead?"

"Can you doubt it? Look at his face—it is as black as a stove!"

"Something must be done mit de pody den. We are liable to be caught at any moment. Schuck it in de river after his brother, freund Hill. Qvick now—— Ha! Vat is dat?"

It was the bow of one of those great lake steamers so plentiful about Chicago which had just projected itself beyond the line of the elevator.

Evidently the steamer was working its way down the river to its mouth.

But for the sharpness of the Jew's eyes they must have been discovered to a certainty.

As it was, the two men had just time to conceal themselves behind the watchman's little house upon the platform, drawing the inanimate body of Burt Leroy after them, as the steamer came alongside.

"De very ting!" whispered Eisenstein, as the great, clumsy craft moved slowly by. "Don't you see? Dere's only von man on deck, and he's forward. Ven she gets furdur along schust you trow de pody on board over mit de stern rail. Dey'll never know where it come from until dey are miles out on de lake—see?"

"But think of the risk? Someone may see us after all. You can't be sure."

"Nonsense. I am sure. Look for yourself. It's schust as I tell you. Quick, now! Now is your schance!"

It was indeed as the Jew had said.

The stern deck of the steamer, for some unknown reason, seemed to be entirely deserted.

Satisfied that such was the case, Winchell Hill raised the body of his victim and, stealing across the platform, dropped it quietly over the stern rail upon the deck.

Then, returning to his concealment, he stood beside his companion watching the steamer as she moved on down the river out of sight.

CHAPTER XVI.

A CONFIDENTIAL TALK CLOSELY CONCERNING THE TWIN RIDERS.

"Are you sure Mr. Eisenstein has gone, auctioneer?" demanded Horace G. Tucker, looking anxiously from face to face of those who occupied the floor of the Chicago Real Estate Exchange.

"Really, I don't see him anywhere, Mr. Tucker," replied the auctioneer, who knew the rich Buffalonian well. "He was here a moment ago and going to pay three hundred thousand for the Grand Consolidated before he let it drop, was blowing around as hard as a backwoods blizzard. Guess he must have blown himself out."

"It was the sight of me or the mention of my name that sent him flying," whispered Mr. Tucker, turning to the circus manager confidentially. "Mr. Spratt, it was a lucky moment for you when I chanced to take a hand in this little sale."

"It was so, Mr. Tucker. It saved me my circus—that's all. When my lawyer made that \$60,000 bid I had reached the end of my rope."

"You don't mean it? What's it all about, anyway?"

"Why, I have the misfortune to owe Moses Eisenstein \$5,000, and—"

"Five thousand! Is that all? How the mischief came you to let him foreclose?"

"I was trying to tell you how I borrowed your check from Rob Leroy, and—"

"Yes—yes, I know!" exclaimed the merchant, who was moving about impatiently. "You told me how the twin sons of my old friend Leroy disappeared last night, and the check with them. It looks bad, very bad; but you need have no fears that they have met with foul play. They'll turn up all right I daresay before the day is over with heads swelled up a little and minus the check—oh, yes, minus the check."

"Minus the check! What do you mean—you speak as

though you knew something." Mr. Spratt questioned quickly, at the same time drawing the Buffalonian away from the auctioneer's platform, where a block of city lots was now being sold amid considerable uproar.

"So I do. I know that I have got that check in my pocket now, with the indorsement of Mike Lynch, the keeper of one of the most notorious gambling dens in the city, upon it. I feared as much, and sent the check to Rob Leroy more than half to try him. Fortunately the teller of the First National Bank knew that I was in the city, and, wondering how my check should happen to fall into such disreputable hands, sent it round by a messenger a few moments ago to know if all was right."

"Mr. Tucker, you wrong those boys," said the manager, with a calmness of manner which he rarely assumed. "What you would intimate is that Rob, instead of going to Eisenstein's, went off on a spree, cashing the check at Lynch's gambling house?"

"Precisely. I've lived and I know the world, Mr. Spratt. A circus is a hard school to bring up boys in. I wanted to find out what sort of chaps these twins were, and now I know."

"Have you the check about you?"

"Certainly, here it is."

And as Mr. Tucker spoke he drew the check from a leather wallet, placing it in the manager's hands.

Mr. Spratt turned the check over quickly.

On the back the name of Rob Leroy had been scrawled, evidently by some illiterate person, with the indorsement of the gambler beneath.

"And on this slight evidence you judge those boys?" demanded Mr. Spratt, gravely. "Look at that endorsement, my friend. I tell you in the most emphatic manner that Rob Leroy never wrote it. It resembles his signature in no way. Has this check been paid?"

"No."

"Then it must not be. I shall take it to police headquarters immediately; though I am in trouble enough, heaven knows. I'll sell everything I possess, but I'll find those boys and set them right in your eyes and the eyes of the world. Drink! why, neither of them have ever tasted liquor. Gamble! Mr. Tucker, I doubt greatly if either Burt or Rob could tell the jack of diamonds from the queen of clubs."

"You are getting excited, Mr. Spratt."

"I know I am, but I can't help it, sir. If the boys were my own sons I couldn't feel more strongly. Some terrible thing has happened to them, but your suggestion is utterly false. It is my belief that Eisenstein and that scoundrel of a ringmaster, who shall never set foot in my tent again, is at the bottom of it all."

"And I believe you," said Mr. Tucker, grasping the manager warmly by the hand. "I was wrong; I take it all back. Now I come to think of it, Eisenstein has only too good reason for wanting to make way with the boys."

"Ah! now you are talking. But if you knew this, why didn't you tackle Eisenstein when you first came on the floor of the exchange?"

"Because I didn't for an instant guess it was Eisenstein," replied the Buffalonian, quickly. "Never saw the fellow in my life. Wouldn't have known he was here if I hadn't heard the auctioneer speak his name."

"But you said—"

"That he has good reason for wishing the boys out of the way—yes. I did say so. Look here, Mr. Spratt, since your interest in Burt and Rob Leroy is so great, you have a right to know all that I know. Has Rob told you about our meeting in Buafflo?"

"Yes."

"And of my intimations that his father left a very considerable estate?"

"He told me all last night."

"That is, all he knew."

"Of course; and you can't think how I blame myself for borrowing that check."

"Let that pass; there is no use in regretting what can't be helped. What Rob Leroy told you amounts to nothing, for the reason that he knew nothing. The matter has assumed such shape that it will bear telling. Shall I tell you now?"

"As well now as any time."

"Then here you have it. Would it surprise you to know that Burt and Rob Leroy are legally entitled to more than three hundred thousand dollars of the fortune Moses Eisenstein calls his own?"

"You can't mean it, Mr. Tucker!"

"But I do, though. I set one of the best lawyers in New York City at work investigating the matter within three days after my interview with Rob Leroy in Buffalo, and I am obliged to confess that I was astounded myself at what he found."

"You see, the father of these boys was an old friend of mine, and as they have no doubt told you, he was believed by everyone to have died poor."

"This struck me as strange, since I knew him to have been well fixed a few years before his death, and it surprised others also, it seems; but though some slight effort was made to investigate his affairs at the time, no property whatever could be found."

"Now, the result of my investigation shows a very different state of affairs from what was supposed to exist."

"It seems that two years before he died Mr. Leroy sold off everything, and invested in a secret process for the extraction of mineral dyes from coal tar."

"So close was it kept that no one knew anything about the matter except this man Eisenstein, who was a partner in the enterprise, and when Leroy was killed in that railroad accident there was not so much as a scrap of paper found to show that the partnership ever had an existence."

"And the invention proved successful?" demanded Mr. Spratt, who had listened with close attention.

"Successful beyond all belief," was the reply. "Eisenstein cleared two millions, and then sold out the business. All that is now necessary is to serve the legal papers upon this scoundrel, demanding an accounting of the partnership. It wouldn't greatly surprise me if we found that the boys were entitled to half a million. Once we can put our finger on the fellow he'll have to show his hand, for my lawyer has discovered abundant proof of the justice of the claim."

"And does Eisenstein know this?" asked the manager.

"He does. It was for this reason he left New York."

"And for the same reason he has, perhaps, made way with Burt and Rob! Mr. Tucker, we must not lose an instant. The police shall know of this. As I said before, if it costs me my last dollar the mystery must be explained."

But that day passed and the next as well without a ray of light being shed upon the strange disappearance of the twin riders of the ring.

Besides this, there was another disappearance to record.

Moses Eisenstein and Winchell Hill, though sought for in every direction, could not be found.

At the clothing store on Blue Island avenue it was said that the Jew had "gone West." An indefinite statement which went for nothing at all.

Whatever might have been the truth, it was evident that Eisenstein, alarmed at the sudden appearance of Mr. Tucker in Chicago, had taken a hasty leave.

Happy Joe, the clown, upon being questioned, declared that the remarks he had let fall in his cups meant nothing—that he had not seen Winchell Hill since the circus left New York.

Detectives were set at work, search was made in every direction, but all to no purpose.

On the third day Mr. Spratt was reluctantly forced to abandon all personal attention to the matter.

A great circus must keep its engagements or go to destruction, and the "Grand Consolidated" moved on by rail to Minneapolis and St. Paul, minus its chief attraction, the twin riders of the ring.

CHAPTER XVII.

CIRCUS BUSINESS ON THE LAKE.

"Gentlemen, will some of you have the kindness to tell me where I am and how I came here?"

It was an extraordinary request, certainly, and it caused Captain Cutter of the Northern Transit Company's steamer Pewaukee to look up from an excellent poker hand in amazement at the speaker, a young man who had knocked modestly upon the half-open door of his private room.

"What the blue blazes ails the fellow, anyhow?" thundered the captain. "Who are ye and how did ye come here! Upon my word, you must have been powerful lush when you came aboard last night. Say, Mr. Whitson, be you going to call or not?"

There were three persons taking a hand in Captain Cutter's little poker game beside the commander of the Pewaukee himself.

These were Mr. Whitson, of St. Paul, Minnesota, who owns, as everyone in the Northwest is aware, the finest stud of racing horses in the United States, and two well-known horse trainers, whose names we have deemed it best to conceal.

Though somewhat coarse by nature, Mr. Whitson was possessed of a kind and generous heart.

He was on his return from the Chicago races, and the Pewaukee carried on the main deck horses belonging to him that half a million would not buy.

As the young man who had knocked at the door of the stateroom had preferred a civil request, it struck Mr. Whitson that he was entitled to a civil answer, and he told Captain Cutter as much in his own blunt way.

"What! Delay the game to talk to a drunken deckhand?" retorted the captain. "If you insist upon it, Mr. Whitson, it's nothing to me. Here, you—who the mischief are you, anyhow, and what is it you want to know?"

Now, the young man at the door was not in the best of trim, it must be admitted. He wore a blue shirt, tattered trousers, a battered hat, and a pair of wretched old shoes.

Beside this, his face was cut and bruised, and there were great black marks about his neck, just as though some evilly-disposed person had been trying to choke him to death.

Yet he was a handsome youth for all that, and as his frank, open gaze met that of the poker-playing captain, the latter was somehow reduced to a sort of half civility in spite of himself.

"Will one of you have the kindness to tell me where I am and how I came here?"

In the same bewildered way the question was repeated again.

"You're on board the Pewaukee, bound for Duluth, away up on Lake Superior—that's where you are," replied the captain. "As to how you came here, you ought to know that better than I can tell you. Shouldn't drink so much rum, young fellow, then you wouldn't lose your head."

"Gentlemen, I assure you that I never tasted liquor in my life. I——"

"There, there, I've answered your questions—now you git!" roared the captain. "Blow me if I kin see what the 'farnal my mate wanted to ship a hand like you fer. Git now! Git,

or I'll give you something to take along with you that mebbee ye won't like."

Slowly the young man moved away from the door of the captain's stateroom.

There was not much satisfaction to be obtained there—that was evident.

There was still less to be had from the mate, who, when addressed, called him a "stowaway," threatened to have him arrested upon their arrival at Duluth, and ordered him to slush down the deck under penalty of being "chucked overboard" forthwith.

Altogether, the young man in the blue shirt and the ragged trousers found reason to believe before the morning was over that he had fallen in with a pretty hard crowd.

There was some mystery about this young man, and on the trip of the Pewankee up Lake Michigan and through the blue waters of Lake Superior during the days which followed, it was not explained.

Captain Cutter, Mr. Whitson and the trainers—these were the only passengers—played poker incessantly, and never troubled themselves concerning the crew. The mate was so surly that no one dared to address him, and as for the deckhands, the young man would hold no communication with them, further than to give his name as Burt Leroy.

Burt Leroy!

Well, the secret is out.

Not that it can have been much of a mystery to the reader, though to understand how he came to be on board the Pewankee was not a little perplexing to Burt himself.

From the moment when Burt, attacked by Winchell Hill, had been forced down upon the platform in front of the elevator, until he regained consciousness only to find himself lying in a bunk in the fo'castle of the Pewankee, all was a blank.

The explanation of Burt's presence on the steamer is already familiar to the reader, and when we add that in his fall the boy's head came in contact with a heavy iron spike which protruded above the level of the platform, the long period of unconsciousness which followed will likewise be understood.

When the sailors found him lying there on the lower stern-deck they thought him a new hand shipped by the mate, who had come aboard drunk, and, sailor fashion, appropriated the boy's belongings, substituting for his good clothes some old duds of their own.

They are a hard lot, these lake steamer hands, and quite different from their brethren who follow the sea.

To Burt his situation seemed terrible.

Since neither captain nor mate would listen to him, what was he to do?

Clearly there was nothing to do but to wait patiently until the end of the trip, and then make the best of his way to St. Paul, at which place the circus by that time would be due.

Under ordinary circumstances the boy's disagreeable situation would not have worried him.

It was the thought of Rob that drove him nearly wild.

And the few days necessary to take the Pewankee to Duluth dragged wearily on.

* * * * *

"They see us! Thank God, they see us! Courage, my men, there's hope for us yet!"

Again the scene is the deck of the Pewankee, but now all is sadly changed.

A fierce storm has been raging for an entire day and night.

The great lake steamer, overloaded, with broken machinery and leaking badly, has been for hours at the mercy of the waves.

"What is she?" shouted Mr. Whitson in the captain's ear above the howling of the storm.

The answer was lost to Burt Leroy, who strained his ears to catch it, and as the moments passed a steamer, the counterpart of the Pewankee, attracted by their signals of distress, bore down alongside.

By this time the clouds had rolled away, and with the break of morning the wind fell to a considerable extent.

There was little difficulty in passing from the doomed Pewankee which was settling lower in the water every moment to the deck of the rescuing steamer.

It was even possible to run a gangplank across, and by this means some of the lighter portions of the cargo were transferred.

As the morning advanced, however, it became evident that the steamer must sink, and the waves still ran far too high to permit any of Mr. Whitson's valuable race horses being removed.

"It's no use, sir!" exclaimed Captain Cutter, as the millionaire for the twentieth time demanded that the attempt should be made.

"If your trainers can't do it I'm sure my men can't. The man don't live who could drive those horses over that plank from one steamer to the other in a swell like this."

It was true.

The trainers had tried it, and had failed.

On the ocean, where the tide ebbs and flows, it would have been entirely impossible to keep the gangplank between the two steamers at all, and even here on the lake, in spite of the fact that both were at anchor and had been lashed together at bows and stern in hope of rescuing Mr. Whitson's valuable stud, it was a very difficult thing.

"Cut the lashings!" roared Captain Cutter. "The Pewankee is doomed. We've done all man can do."

"Ten thousand dollars to the man who drives Ringrose over that plank!" echoed Mr. Whitson, who was pacing the deck like a madman. "Twenty-five thousand for them all!"

Not a man moved.

"I'll bring Ringrose over, sir, if you'll send someone on board to pick him out for me," said a voice at the millionaire's side.

"You!"

It was the mate's stowaway who had spoken. The young man who had been the subject of the captain's snubs, and had taken the kicks and cuffs of the crew during the entire voyage.

"I'm sure I can do it, sir."

"Then try," cried Mr. Whitson. "I'll go on board and pick Ringrose out myself."

"It's absurd," said one of the trainers, as all stood watching the gangplank, which was bobbing up and down between the steamers, waiting for Mr. Whitson and the venturesome youth to appear.

"The horse don't live that would walk that plank. They'll both be drowned, as sure as fate."

"There they come!" cried one of the deckhands.

Then in a low voice he added:

"Plague take it! Why, the boy has gone and changed his clothes! I say, fellers, he's got on them duds what we hooked!"

Instead of the youth with the blue shirt and tattered trousers, he who rode the horse upon the bobbing plank, though his counterpart in face and form, now wore an entirely different dress.

"It's the same feller, though!" whispered one.

"And his goose is cooked!" said another.

"Great Gosh! there's two on 'em!" muttered the mate, and they're as near alike as two peas. Am I getting the snakes again!"

A second horse mounted by a boy rider had just appeared in the gangway of the Pewankee behind the moving plank.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN AWFUL SITUATION.

Two boys exactly resembling each other, riding race horses up the plank leading from the wrecked Pewaukee to the main deck of the rescuing steamer, where one only went on board!

Then of a certainty the other can be no less a person than Rob Leroy, whom we left unconscious in the hands of the river thieves, Reddy Cook and his friend Bill.

Rob it was for a fact, and his presence on board the Pewaukee must be accounted for before this narrative advances another step.

As far as Rob himself is concerned, this would be a difficult thing to do.

To this day the young circus rider has not been able to account for the sudden discovery that he was in the hold of a lake steamer, since he remembered nothing of all that transpired from the moment Winchell Hill, with treacherous hand, thrust him out of the elevator window, to the time when he came to his senses in the hold of the Pewaukee.

"Then how did you find out all about Reddy Cook and the rest of it?" did we hear someone ask.

Well, as the boys say, "that's telling."

We did find out, and what is more, that which we have written is strictly true—ain't that enough?

As for Rob, with him it was all mystery, for he awoke to consciousness only to find himself lying on his back in total darkness upon a bed which seemed to be laboring under an aggravated attack of the blind staggers, rocking from side to side.

Rob started up with that strange, terrified feeling which one sometimes experiences upon suddenly awakening from a dream.

What had happened?

Where was he?

Surely he must be on the water, the bed rolled so!

Had he been asleep and dreaming all these strange things about \$5,000 checks—the grain elevator—Winchell Hill's push and that terrible fall?

Rob put out his hand in the darkness, half expecting to find his brother lying asleep beside him.

He was badly mixed, and no wonder.

In his fall from the elevator window he had struck his head a fearful blow.

Hence the long period of unconsciousness.

But for the happening along of the two river thieves at that opportune moment the young circus rider would now have been numbered among the dead.

But Rob did not know this.

Neither did he know that Reddy Cook and his friend Bill had, after robbing him, tossed his body into the open hatch of the Pewaukee as she lay tied up alongside a lumber-yard at some distance from the elevator where the incident occurred.

For the next ten minutes Rob Leroy was the most badly mystified fellow you can possibly imagine.

When matters straightened themselves out in his mind at last he found them bad enough.

He was in the hold of a steamer, lying upon the top of a compact mass of freight in total darkness, without food or water, with scarcely air enough to breathe.

Besides this, his head was badly cut and the best of his clothes gone.

As for his watch, scarfpin, cuffbuttons, and, above all, the \$5,000 check, they were gone, too.

Is it any wonder that in the long hours which followed Rob Leroy almost went insane?

His situation was terrible—so terrible that we do not care to describe it.

Fortunately, he was able to keep up his courage, and, still more fortunately, to discover among the freight a large packing-case, badly broken, which proved to contain various kinds of crackers in tin boxes.

It was this discovery which saved his life.

And so the time went on.

Whither was the steamer bound?

This was the question the boy asked himself again and again during those hours of trial.

It was a question to which no answer could possibly be returned.

It was all in vain for him to try and make himself heard, for above his head horses could be heard neighing and stamping, and keeping up a fearful racket.

If he could only find the hatch something might be done to make his presence known, but in this direction all his efforts proved vain.

Then came the storm.

All through that fearful season poor Rob had as much as he could do to keep out of the way of the shifting freight, which had been stowed in the most slovenly manner possible, and which threatened to crush him every time he attempted to make a move.

He had shouted himself hoarse.

He had scrambled about over boxes and bales until utterly exhausted.

And as the violence of the storm increased, and the steamer pitched and rolled, Rob, who was almost mad with thirst, climbed upon the top of a tier of cases and laid down, expecting every moment to feel the water rush in upon him and bring the end.

Then, utterly weary, not caring how soon death should come to relieve his sufferings, the wretched boy strangely enough did what he had not been able to do for many hours—fell fast asleep.

Now time had become as nothing to Rob Leroy.

Whether it was darkness or daylight when he fell asleep, he neither knew nor cared.

When he awoke things were quieter.

The steamer was rolling heavily, it is true, but the awful pitching had ceased.

Rob opened his eyes and looked about him.

He instantly discovered that his desperate situation had undergone an important change.

In the first place, the water had penetrated the hold at last. He could hear it splashing about among the freight with every movement of the ill-fated craft.

Then, instead of the black darkness which had previously surrounded him, he could now perceive at no great distance away a light streaming down upon the confused mass of freight from above.

Overhead he could still hear the stamping of the horses, still louder than ever, and he could also hear voices—this brought to his soul an overpowering sense of relief.

To scramble over the cases and bring himself beneath the light was but the work of a moment.

The next and Rob Leroy had raised his voice in a resounding shout for help.

"Why, there must be someone down in the hold," he heard a voice exclaim above him.

Then over the combing of the open hatch a head was thrust.

To his intense amazement it was the head of his brother Burt.

CHAPTER XIX.

MR. SPRATT HAS A GREAT SURPRISE.

"Young man, do you think you can accomplish what you have undertaken?"

"I never undertake what I can't accomplish, sir. That ain't my style."

"I admire your confidence, but I doubt your ability. There is still a heavy sea on, the steamer is rocking terribly. Do you believe you can force obedience when you order Ringrose to ascend the plank?"

"I expect him to obey me, sir. I am perfectly at home with horses. I never saw one yet which I could not control."

Burt and the rich horse owner, Mr. Whitson, of St. Paul, were the speakers, and the main deck of the sinking Pewaukee the scene of action, of course.

The steamer was still rolling alarmingly, and in her badly damaged condition might be expected to founder at any moment.

Whatever was to be done toward saving the horses must be done quickly—there was no disputing that.

"Which is Ringrose?" demanded Burt, glancing at the valuable stud of racers which, with full comprehension of their danger, seemingly, were stamping and neighing, and striving by every means to work themselves free.

"That black stallion," replied Mr. Whitson, pointing out the horse. "Now look here, young man, don't you run any risk. I had rather lose a dozen Ringroses than— Great grief! What was that?"

"Why, there must be someone in the hold!" cried Burt, springing toward the hatch, which during the excitement had been opened by one of the deckhands, with the dear knows what end in view.

"Someone in the hold! Impossible! Who would be fool enough to— What's that you say?"

"It's Rob! It's my brother. A rope! Oh, where is there a rope! Great God, I thank Thee for bringing me on board again!"

Now we have no time for details.

Our story is becoming well advanced, and there still remains much to tell.

Burt's amazement, Rob's unspeakable joy and relief, Mr. Whitson's great surprise, must all be passed over in silence.

Suffice to say that the rope was found, Rob drawn up out of the hold of the sinking steamer, and a moment later the twins were locked in each other's arms.

"For heaven's sake, what brought you here?" gasped Burt the instant he had recovered his power of speech.

"Winchell Hill's doings. Burt—and you?"

"Winchell Hill again, Rob. We owe that man a terrible reckoning, and—"

"And while you two are wasting time," broke in Mr. Whitson, "my chances on Ringrose are growing beautifully less."

"Rob!" cried his brother, thus recalled to himself. "Do you grasp the situation? Here are horses belonging to this gentleman worth thousands of dollars. I have promised to ride the most valuable among them up that plank. You can take another?"

"I can, Burt. It is nothing to do."

"Nothing!" cried Mr. Whitson. "Nothing! One would think to hear you talk that you two were old circus riders—"

"Very well," said Burt, quietly. "And so we are."

"Do you mean it?"

"Indeed I do."

"Your names?"

"I am Burt, my brother Rob Leroy."

"Thunder!" exclaimed the millionaire. "The twin riders of

Montmorency's circus, whose disappearance has caused such a stir in Chicago. This is a lucky day for me."

And so it was.

We dare affirm that under no other combination of circumstances could the valuable stud belonging to the Minnesota millionaire have had the ghost of a chance.

"Which horse shall I take, sir?" asked Rob, as Burt unhitched Ringrose and sprang upon his back.

"Take Susie K, if you can take any," replied Mr. Whitson, pointing out a handsome bay mare. "But, see here, you may not be strong enough. You are looking terribly. Think of all you have passed through. Think—"

"I will think when we have saved your horses!" cried Rob as he undid the hitching-strap and leaped upon the back of Susie K. "Now, then, Burt, with a rush up that plank! This thing has got to be done quickly or not at all."

—And indeed this was the truth.

Already the Pewaukee had settled considerably, and the men on board the rescuing steamer had all they could do to keep the plank in place.

With the peculiar cry by which he was accustomed to urge on his horses in the ring, Burt Leroy dug his heels into the horse's flanks.

"There he comes! There he comes!" went up the shout from the deck of the rescuing steamer, and then came those other exclamations of astonishment at sight of Rob—Burt's living image—urging on Susie K. behind.

How did they manage it?

Certainly we shall never tell.

Not being circus riders, how can we be expected to know?

There was a tremendous scramble, loud shouts from Burt and up the steep ascent of the swaying plank, with dilated nostrils, came thousands upon thousands of dollars' worth of horseflesh safe and sound.

Mr. Whitson scrambled after, gaining the deck in time to lend his voice to the deafening cheer which rose.

He was none too soon.

Scarce had the feet of the twin riders touched the planks, as they leaped from the backs of Ringrose and Susie K., than there came a sudden rush—a whirl—and the ill-fated Pewaukee, now fortunately cut loose from her rescuer, sank beneath the waves and was seen no more.

* * * * *

"Fire 'em out! Shoot the muffs! We won't have 'em! We want the Leroys! Give us the Leroys!"

"Now, upon my word, this is too bad!" cried Mr. Spratt, who was peering out from behind the canvas into the circus ring.

"Great Caesar, I can't give them the Leroys! I only wish I could. They are right, too. Those fellows are regular muffs. I'll bounce them to-night. They can't ride for a cent."

It was at St. Paul, Minnesota.

The great circus had pitched its tent upon the high bluffs overlooking the Mississippi river at a point somewhat above the Metropolitan Hotel.

Ill luck seemed to follow the unfortunate manager.

In the absence of the twin favorites two bareback riders had been engaged in Chicago.

This was their first appearance, and most wretched substitutes for Burt and Bob Leroy had they proved.

Twice already had they fallen from their horses, and, to be brief, their performance had turned out a perfect botch.

The tent resounded with cat-calls, cries of "Hustle 'em out!" "Give us the Leroys!" and the like.

And, after all, it was the manager's own fault.

He had no business to bill these fellows as the genuine Leroy Brothers.

Just this he had done, and into the ring they had ridden without the slightest explanation.

Here was the result.

"It would be better to go out and explain to the audience, I should say," suggested Hughes, the menagerie superintendent, now long since restored to the manager's good graces.

"Do you think so?"

"I do, most decidedly."

"Upon my word I am afraid they'll rotten-egg me. What are we ever going to do? Those fellows can't ride, and that's all there is about it."

"Suppose you discharge them, then where will you be? You will have to look a long while before you pick up anyone who can ride even as well as they do away up here in the Northwest."

"That's all right. I can send to New York."

"And engage good riders in the middle of the season? I doubt it. All the best are with Barnum, the small shows have the rest, and any way you put it you can't get two riders to hold a candle to Burt and Rob Leroy."

Now this was strictly true, and Mr. Spratt knew it.

He could not tell the audience the story of the Leroy Brothers, although doubtless many present were aware that the twin riders were strangely missing; so instead of leaving the matter to settle itself, and the boys in the upper seats to be settled by the policeman's rattan, Mr. Spratt very foolishly went out into the ring and made a long, rambling speech, urging that order be maintained, and pretending that the falls of the new riders had been a part of the programme and prearranged.

While not actually claiming that these were the genuine Leroy, he still intimated as much.

This was more than the audience in its present temper could bear.

The catcalls and hootings continued.

It was as much as the policemen in charge could do to quiet them.

Whether or no they would have succeeded at all, had not Happy Joe began his fun just as the new riders vanished behind the curtain, it is difficult to say.

"Well, thank goodness that's over with," puffed Spratt, mopping his perspiring brow. "I suppose we'll have to have it again when those fellows go on for the second time, though. If I wasn't so out of practice I'd take a horse myself."

Next came the Petry Brothers, the famous acrobats—who, by the way, were not related to each other in the slightest degree.

They were well received and loudly applauded.

The audience seemed trying to make up for its unruly conduct.

But then the Petry Brothers are great favorites, as everyone knows.

Then Happy Joe did his great donkey act, following which Signor Spandalini was brought in from the sideshow in order to help out a rather weak programme with his great sword-swallowing business, which was received with deafening cheers.

Meanwhile Mr. Spratt, determining that order should be maintained at all hazards, had armed himself with a huge

rattan and gone out among the top seats of the tier, ready to slash right and left in case of the slightest disturbance when the bogus Leroy Brothers came on again.

"I'll fix 'em!" he whispered to one of the policemen. "There shan't be no row in my circus, not if the court knows herself. To-morrow I'll publish a card in the Pioneer Press and give the truth of the matter just as it is."

Just then Mlle. Zitella, the dashing female rider, appeared in the ring, and the last bareback act following immediately upon her exit, Mr. Spratt made ready to use his rattan.

"Thunder! Why don't the fools come on?" he thought, as Mlle. Zitella disappeared amid great applause, and in the absence of any other attraction, Happy Joe began his jokes again.

Evidently the audience were wondering, too.

"Leroys! Give us the Leroys!" was the call that went up among them, when suddenly the canvas flew back and two bold, young bareback riders, standing upon four coal-black horses, dashed into the ring.

"Hooray—hooray! Them's the Leroys! Three cheers for the Leroys!"

Every man and boy on the upper tiers had risen to his feet, the tent resounding with their deafening cheers.

Well, how about the rattan?

Why does not the manager use it?

Use it?

Why, he is shouting himself—shouting like mad!

These are no bungling riders who have entered the ring.

They are Burt and Rob Leroy.

CHAPTER XX.

HAPPY JOE SHOWN IN HIS TRUE COLORS AT LAST.

"There they come! There are the boys! Upon my word, they are a pair of fine young fellows. I must say I don't blame you, Ethel, for fancying Rob Leroy, although I could wish he was something beside a circus rider."

"Nonsense, father! You have no reason to assume that I care anything about Rob Leroy. Of course, after all that has happened I am interested in the young man. Even you are obliged to admit that he is the handsomest fellow you ever saw; and as for his being a circus rider, I'm sure so long as he behaves himself properly, as Rob always has and always will, that is no disgrace."

"Well, upon my word! So I've no reason to assume that you care anything about the young man, haven't I? Ethel, you are a cool one. But go on—you shall have my blessing if it comes to that." And in a low tone, to himself, Mr. Tucker added: "If things turn out for the boys as I believe they will, circus rider or no circus rider, Ethel might do worse."

"There they are now, Burt! Look, don't you see her? I knew they'd be here to-night. Didn't I tell you so? I tell you you can talk about the beauty of the Frisco girls as much as you like—they can't hold a candle to her."

"Where are they, Rob? I don't see them."

"There in the second row to the left."

"I see now. You've been writing to that girl, you rascal, and never told me."

"Well, what if I have?"

"Nothing, only she must have answered—otherwise how did you know she was in San Francisco, much less that she would be here to-night?"

"Burt, you imagine altogether too much."

"I imagine that you are head and ears in love with Ethel Tucker, and I wish you success with all my heart."

"Here, here, boys, you'll have to do it. They'll never stop their racket outside until you go on again."

And the twin riders of the ring, their conversation interrupted by Manager Montague Montmorency, or plain Samuel Spratt, whichever you please, leaped upon the backs of their horses and went through their performance again in response to the deafening encore.

Now, the first conversation took place in the auditorium, the second in the performers' quarters of the great Hippodrome at San Francisco, away out on Market street, beyond Woodward's Gardens, on a certain evening late in the fall.

Weeks—yes, months—have passed since the sudden appearance of the twin riders in the ring at St. Paul, and the tour of the Grand Consolidated across the continent is completed at last.

Completed, yes, and successfully completed.

Minneapolis, Des Moines, Omaha, Kansas City, St. Louis, Salt Lake, Sacramento and a host of smaller towns have been visited without an incident occurring to mar a run of unprecedented success.

Stormy as was the first portion the journey, taken as a whole, has brought good luck both to Burt and Rob and their kind friend Mr. Manager Spratt, whose joy at finding the boys safe and sound on that memorable night at St. Paul knew no bounds.

In the first place, the brothers found themselves the happy possessors of some \$30,000, \$25,000 being the liberal reward paid by Mr. Whitson for the rescue of his race horses, Ringrose and Susie K., the additional \$5,000 being the proceeds of Mr. Tucker's check.

As for Mr. Spratt, he had settled his obligation to Moses Eisenstein through the latter's lawyers long ago, and had found no difficulty in accomplishing this, since his St. Paul engagement had proved the most profitable he had ever known.

From far and near people flocked to see the heroes of the wrecked Pewaukee, whose doings were well advertised in the local news columns, as may be readily believed.

Now in all these months not a word had been heard either of Eisenstein or Winchell Hill.

Warrants issued by the Chicago police had proved useless. Detectives who were set on their track failed to find them, and it began to look as though this pair of precious plotters had left the country never to return.

Of course this was bad for the prospects of our twin heroes. Although they had not seen Mr. Tucker, they had frequently

heard from him, and knew that he was actively engaged in their matters.

Still, so his lawyers assured him, Mr. Tucker stated nothing could be done toward recovering the property of the father of Burt and Rob, until they could lay their hands on Eisenstein, in which effort they had so far signally failed.

Now if Rob had had intimation of Mr. Tucker's intention to visit San Francisco, Burt had not.

He felt, naturally, that his brother should have confided in him.

Consequently the close of the performance that evening found them discussing the matter again.

It was in the greenroom of the Hippodrome building.

The audience and most of the company had taken their departure.

The boys were indulging in their little controversy when Manager Spratt, followed by a gentleman and lady, came bustling in.

"Here they are! Here they are! I knew we'd find 'em!" exclaimed Mr. Spratt, heartily. "Burt, Rob, here are some friends of yours."

Then there was a great deal of handshaking and a great deal of talking.

Mr. Tucker, who had never met Burt, entered into a full explanation of the position of affairs, while Rob was devoting himself to Miss Ethel, which was altogether the proper thing to do.

"You see not a thing can be done until we can lay hands on that scoundrel, Eisenstein," said Mr. Tucker, after the conversation had been in progress for an hour and more. "The detectives have searched for him everywhere, but after the dastardly part he has played the fellow has sense enough to keep out of the way. It was reported to me the other day in Chicago that he had been seen in San Francisco, so as Ethel was anxious to see California, and I more than anxious to have this business settled, we determined to take the trip out, and here we are."

"And now that you are here, what are your plans?" asked the manager. "I can hardly believe that Eisenstein can be in the city, or I should have run across him before this, since this is our third week in San Francisco. If he is here, though, don't spare any effort to catch him. I'm flush now and wouldn't mind spending a good round sum to get square with the fellow, and with Hill, too, for what they did to these boys."

"Oh, money is no object," replied Mr. Tucker. "If Burt and Rob can only have justice done them they'll have all the money they can ever want. I've already set the San Francisco police on Eisenstein's track, and— Look here, Mr. Spratt! Don't you smell smoke? Upon my word I believe there is something burning outside that door."

"Now you speak, I do notice it. There can't be anything wrong—heavens, but there is, though! If this building should be on fire I am a ruined man!"

A quick puff of smoke bursting through the keyhole and through the cracks of the door at this moment made it apparent to all that Mr. Tucker had been right.

At the same instant came the sound of some heavy body falling, followed by other curious sounds.

Mr. Spratt sprang toward the door and flung it open.

A dense black smoke burst into the room.

At the same instant the sounds of voices whispering became audible further along the passage, followed almost instantly by a tremendous scrambling—another fall—then footsteps hurrying away.

The manager, Mr. Tucker and Burt dashed through the smoke into the passage.

Rob, opening another door, hurried Miss Ethel out into the auditorium, from which there could be no difficulty in gaining the open air.

Meanwhile it was speedily discovered by those who had entered the passage, which led down off to the stables where the animals belonging to the menagerie were confined, that a fire of no small proportions was already gaining headway, for at that instant the flooring, which seemed to have been sprinkled with some sort of inflammable substance, burst in a dozen places into flames.

"What fiend's work is this?" cried Mr. Spratt, in dismay. "The whole place is ablaze! I am ruined! After them, Burt! There go the scoundrels now! Bless my soul, here's one of them on the floor!"

They had stumbled over the body of a man lying prostrate just beyond the line of the flames, perceiving even as they did so two other forms hurrying off down the dark passage out of sight.

While Burt dashed after the flying forms, Mr. Tucker hurried to the greenroom, seized a fire bucket which he had observed there, and flung it on the flames.

Meanwhile the manager had stooped and raised the fallen man.

"Why, it's Riley!" burst from the lips of Mr. Spratt as he did this.

"It's Happy Joe, my clown! He's as drunk as a lord."

"That you, Spratt—old Spratt, eat no fat!" blurted out the clown, in thick, maudlin accents. "Yer old show's a goner—a goner d'ye hear? Serves you right—said I'd get square. We did it—Eisenstein, Winch Hill and me!"

CHAPTER XXI.

CONCLUSION.

Little did Burt Leroy imagine when, leaving Mr. Tucker and his friend, the manager of the Grand Consolidated, he sprang along the passage, that the conclusion of all his perplexities was so near.

Frequently the end of seemingly endless trouble is close at hand without our being aware of it.

It was so in this instance.

While our friends were discussing the ways and means in the greenroom of the San Francisco Hippodrome, fate was quietly working into their hands in a way they little dreamed.

There were two men running along the passage.

Though in the darkness he could see nothing, Burt could tell this by the sound of their footsteps.

That the chase bid fair to prove a dangerous one he was made only too well aware when, out of the darkness, a bullet came whizzing past his head.

With most men this would have been a clincher.

In the case of Burt Leroy it did not even bring him to a halt.

He knew that the passage came to an end at the top of a flight of stairs leading down into the rooms where the animals belonging to the menagerie were kept, and he knew also that there was no other exit in the direction which the fugitives had chosen except by a window at a little distance ahead, which was raised some twenty feet above the ground.

If the incendiaries were familiar with the building, then by the window they might escape.

If, on the contrary, such was not the case, they would be sure to descend the stairs and become entangled in the maze of passages leading to the various rooms below.

"Halt, or I fire!" shouted Burt, dashing ahead. "You are dead men if you advance another step!"

It was a bold but unsuccessful effort.

Did the incendiaries know that he was unarmed?

Certainly it seemed so, for they paused only to send a second bullet whizzing through the darkness, which by great good fortune went as wide of the mark as the first.

"Out of the window!" Burt heard a voice exclaim, and then by the faint light which broke upon the passage from the window ahead, Burt saw the sash flung up and a man's form spring through the open space.

Burt knew the voice, and by the dim light recognized its owner.

It was Winchell Hill!

He was out of the window and had disappeared in an instant.

The next and the form of his companion was also revealed. As Burt had suspected, it was Moses Eisenstein.

Less agile than the ex-ringmaster, he had failed in his attempt to clear the window, and fell back heavily on the floor, only to regain his feet and spring away as Burt came hurrying up.

Along the passage and down the stairs he sped, the young circus rider hurrying after him.

At the foot of the passage a swinging light burned, and Burt, who was now close upon him, saw the Jew open a door at the foot of the stairs and dash wildly into the room beyond.

In an instant Burt Leroy sprang to the door and turned the key.

The room was a small one into which the cages containing the lions and tigers had been rolled by order of Hughes, the manager of the menagerie, who deemed it advisable that they should be separated from the other beasts.

Now Burt, thoroughly familiar with the premises, knew that there was but one other entrance to this room, and he knew also that this locked on the outside.

There was no occasion for further haste, so far as Eisenstein was concerned.

The Jew had run head first into a trap.

"What's the matter? Where's the fire?" shouted several of the menagerie assistants, who at this moment came hurrying up.

"Have you caught them? Have you caught them?" panted Mr. Tucker, dashing past the menagerie men down the stairs.

"Led me owit—led me owit! Fader Abraham, I shall be killed! I shall be eaten alive!"

Actually, there was not the slightest danger, since the animals were all securely fastened in their cages; but then the room was dark and Eisenstein the greatest coward in the world.

Mingled with the cries of the Jew from behind the door came fearful growlings, roars and snarlings, together with a violent pounding on the panels.

It was a veritable Babel of sound.

"I've got one of them, Mr. Tucker!" gasped Burt, all out of breath. "The other contrived to get away."

"Which one—Eisenstein? Ah, yes, I know his voice. The scoundrel, to endanger all our lives. Well done, Burt Leroy—well done!"

Then there was more racket, this time along the corridor leading to the stables, and outside into the yard behind the hippodrome.

And even as Mr. Spratt appeared dragging the wretched clown, who, in spite of all his struggles, found it impossible to escape, Rob came hurrying along the passage, followed by two stalwart stablemen, who conducted between them, pale and trembling, the late ringmaster, Winchell Hill.

"Hill!" cried Mr. Spratt, dropping Happy Joe a helpless mass to the floor. "You fire this building! You seek to destroy the lives of Burt and Rob to ruin my circus! You, after all the kindness you have experienced from me! I could never have believed it—never in the world!"

"Yet it is true, sir," answered Rob, gravely. "What this man did to myself and my brother is known to everyone. That he caused this fire I can well believe, since I was running along the stable-yard just in time to lay hold of him as he jumped from the window and——"

"Yes, yes, we know he set the fire—we don't think anything about it!" exclaimed Mr. Tucker. "Spratt, this is neither the time nor the place for sentimental reminiscences. Men, bind that scoundrel hand and foot. Go for an officer, some of you. The fire is out; a few buckets of water settled it. Young man, where have you left my daughter? You should have remained at her side. Is she in safe hands? I shall hold you to strict account."

"Safe and sound, sir," replied Rob, as the stablemen executed Mr. Tucker's command upon a confirmatory nod from Spratt. "I left her in charge of Mrs. Hanks, the ladies' dresser. Burt, what is all the row about in that room?"

"Led me owit! Led me owit! I done notings! It vas Winchell Hill vot put up de job. Led me owit before dey eat me, I say!"

And the pounding on the panels was renewed louder than

ever, while the growlings of the beasts, excited by the din, increased to that extent that it was next to impossible to make one's voice heard.

"Open the door, Burt!" shouted Mr. Spratt, "open the door, my boy. This little entertainment is about to close, or I'm all astray in my reckoning. Open the door and let the curtain down upon the last scene."

And Burt opened the door.

Had a swarm of exceedingly young and active bees been behind him, Eisenstein could not have shot out faster than he did.

He had lost his hat, his clothes were covered with the dust of the floor upon which he had fallen, his gold eyeglasses, badly broken, hung dangling from a string.

He did not need them.

Quite powerful enough were his unaided eyes to discover in the determined faces about him that the game he had played so long and so successfully had been played to its end.

"Vell, vat you vant?" he snapped, desperately.

"A man of about your size, I'm thinking," said Mr. Spratt, in a tone of triumph. "Officer, you are just in time."

Even as the manager spoke a stranger strode through the corridor into their midst, laying a heavy hand upon the shoulder of the Jew.

The stranger wore the gray uniform of the San Francisco police.

* * * * *

Manager Spratt was right.

The exciting drama in which our twin heroes had played so prominent a part during the journey of the Grand Consolidated across the continent had at last come to an end.

Now all this happened several years ago, and might have become ancient history by this time had we not revived it for the benefit of such of our readers who have followed the adventures of Burt and Rob Leroy to their close.

The end once reached, the concluding scenes may be disposed of in a few brief words.

Did Burt and Rob get back their father's fortune?

Yes, every penny of it.

And when we state that the amount which the courts finally compelled Moses Eisenstein to disgorge was over half a million, it will be seen that the result was worth all the efforts Mr. Tucker had put forth in their behalf.

The law laid fast hold on these three wrongdoers, and when Happy Joe confessed to being hired by Eisenstein to fire the Hippodrome and all the rest, the effect was to create a sentiment of intense indignation in the public mind.

The result was a prompt trial and a prompter conviction.

Mr. Tucker never for an instant relinquished his efforts, and before leaving San Francisco, which event took place a month later, he had the satisfaction of seeing Eisenstein removed to San Quentin, the California state prison, with a long sentence to serve.

Happy Joe soon joined him, but Winchell Hill was taken charge of by Chicago detectives on a requisition from the governor of Illinois, and for his murderous attack on the Leroy Brothers is now doing time in Joliet.

In the case of the ex-ringmaster, the state was spared all expense of trial, since he made a full confession, in which it came out how the Jew himself had stolen Mr. Spratt's money from the Roman helmet during the confusion following the escape of the tiger; how he himself had been hired to persecute Burt and Rob; how he had sawed the tent-pole at Buffalo, loosed the lion, and been at the bottom of all the disasters which had occurred.

It was a full year before Mr. Tucker's lawyers were able to lay their hands upon Eisenstein's property and restore the brothers to their own.

Before this happened, two interesting events transpired.

First, Burt Leroy was admitted into Mr. Tucker's successful grain business as a partner; next, Rob Leroy was admitted into Mr. Tucker's household as a son.

Rob married Ethel. Burt is still waiting for a wife.

Both are rich and both are happy, and the secret of it all is to be found in the fact that in whatever undertaking the brothers engaged they did it with all their might.

The Grand Consolidated still exists. Annually Manager Spratt starts on his transcontinental tour.

This year the circus started out under the most favorable auspices, and is sure to have a successful season.

Yet, after all, it is without that which once formed its chief attraction—The Twin Riders of the Ring.

THE END.

Read "ON BOARD A MAN-OF-WAR; OR, JACK FARRAGUT IN THE U. S. NAVY," by Capt. Thos. H. Wilson, which will be the next number (312) of "Pluck and Luck."

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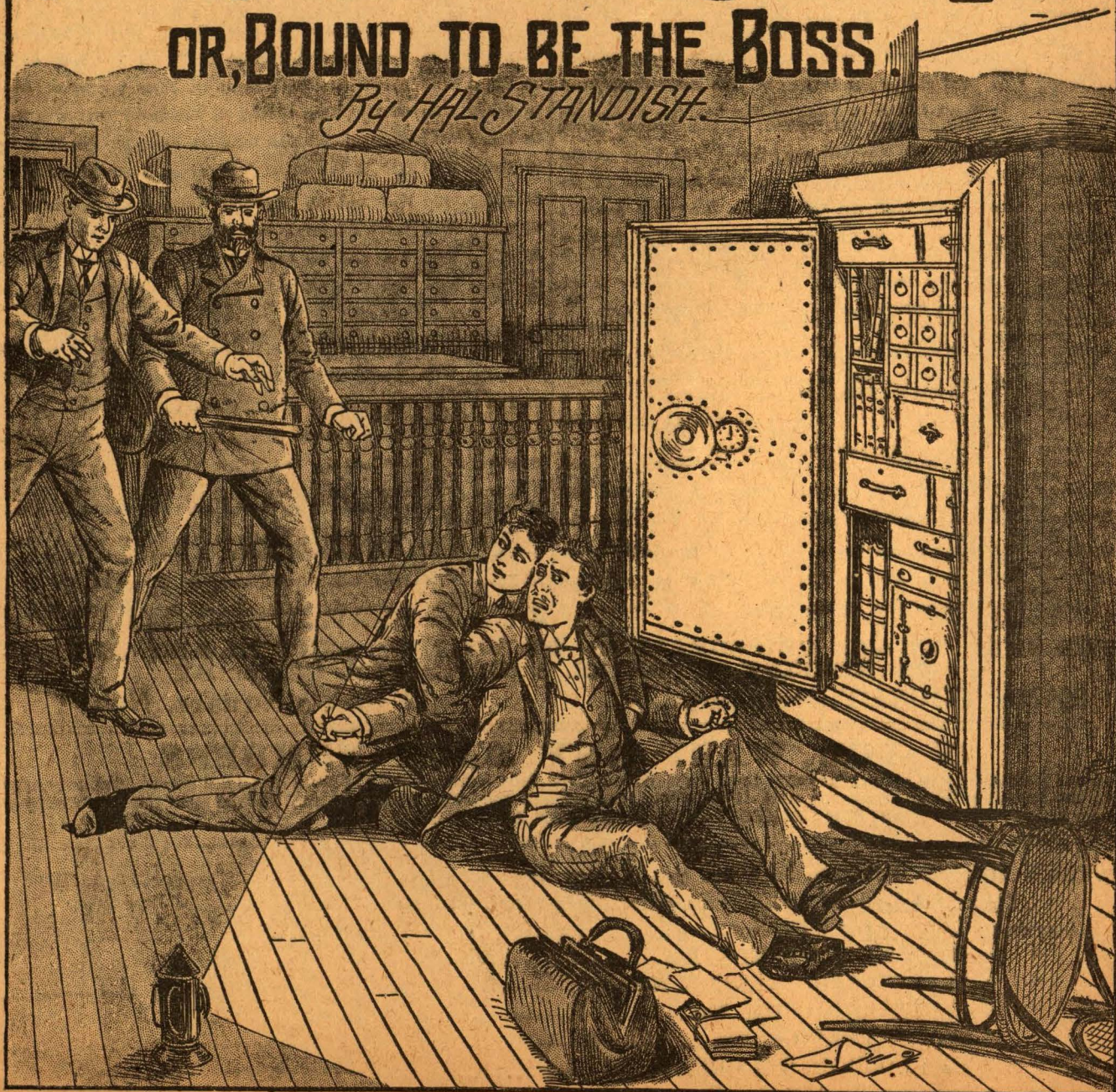
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